

STATIRA;

OR,

THE MOTHER.

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THE INTER

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A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

INTERESTING TALES.

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1831

STATIRA.

CHAP. I.

HAPPY, above many thousands, not only of her sex, but likewise of her equals, did Statira de B** seem to be on her entrance into her eighteenth year. Her fate seemed an enviable one, for every advantage real and imaginary appeared to combine in her favour. Rich, of an ancient and noble family, and by the death of two brothers, who died after they had attained the age of maturity, she was become sole heiress of a large estate; her mind was open and liberal, her understanding solid, her heart good; and, as no expence had been spared on her education,

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she had acquired those talents and accomplishments that usually attach and fetter the hearts of men. She played on different instruments in a masterly manner, and accompanied them with her voice, which was harmony itself; and, as drawing and painting were her favourite amusements, she excelled in them both. She was likewise mistress of the different languages that the sphere she moved in, and the opinion of the *beau-mond*, made necessary; nor had Nature been sparing of her bounty towards her, for her form and features, without being perfect, were sufficiently pleasing to have captivated without the adventitious advantages of birth and fortune. Her temper was mild and affable, her manners gentle and pleasing; and although she knew, that to set a just value on herself, was the sure way to gain, and retain the esteem of others, she was free from pride and affectation; and that nothing might be wanting to render her felicity complete, she received from her indulgent parents, who were convinced her prudence would prevent her making an improper choice, the permission to
dispose

dispose of her hand and heart as inclination directed.

Nor did she abuse the confidence they placed in her : she felt the value of it, and used it with a prudence and moderation that reflected honour on herself. That a number of candidates, and among them men of exalted rank and fortune, would vie with each other to obtain so rich a prize, may easily be supposed. It was a thing of course that did not excite the least wonder either in herself, or others; but that a Prince, who wished to share his throne with her, was amongst the number of her admirers, was an offer, which, although it did not exceed her merit, did her expectations.

The hereditary Prince of N** saw her at a ball, and the passion she inspired him with was so violent, that his parents were at last obliged to grant his wish, and allow him to make honourable proposals to her. He, a handsome, and in many respects an amiable young man, who but seldom let others feel that he expected to be a reigning Prince, did all in his power to gain her affection; and

Statira was perhaps the only person of her rank in the German Empire, who would not have thought herself honoured by an alliance with him—an alliance, that all her friends approved of, and which might indeed be called a splendid one. Her mother was particularly desirous of its taken place, and did what she could, without making use of absolute persuasion, to bias her choice, by enumerating the number of advantages that would accrue from it; and would frequently say between jest and earnest, “but you must own Statira, that your Highness sounds better than Madam or your Ladyship.”

But the sound had no charm for Statira’s ear, nor was her eye dazzled by the splendour of his elevated rank; for she was afraid, when time abated the ardour of passion, he might repent the sacrifice he made on her account, and think the honour of his hand was more than equivalent for the gift of her heart. That was the reason she assigned to her friends for rejecting him; but in all probability, the principal cause was, that her affections were pre-engaged; for as she

she had given the Prince a polite, but decisive refusal, she bestowed her hand on Count Harton, whose birth and fortune nearly resembled her's ; and although he did not possess those superficial advantages that a youthful mind often prefers to sense and merit, he was not deficient of those that constitute real worth. His person was tall and well-made, his face rather pleasing than handsome, his understanding solid and cultivated, and as he had travelled a good deal, and always frequented the best companies, he possessed the art of beginning a conversation with ease, and continuing it in a manner suitable and agreeable to the society he was in. His free and independent spirit, which had induced him to refuse several places that had been offered him by his Prince, rather preferring being master of his own estate, than servant at Court, was his greatest recommendation to Statira's father, whose sentiments entirely corresponded with his in that respect ; and although Count Harton had not always in his youthful years been able to resist the allurements of seduction and plea-

sure, yet he had never committed a mean or dishonourable action. The ardour of youth was abated, for he had just attained his thirtieth year when he paid his addresses to Statira ; but although his love was as sincere as ever warmed the heart of man, there was nothing romantic in his expressions, or manner of shewing his affection—an affection that promised to be lasting, as it was founded on esteem, and the knowledge of her worth ; and when Statira blessed him with her hand, although many rivals envied him the prize he had gained, there were none that could say he was undeserving of it.

The first four years after their marriage passed, as a summer's day, inexpressibly happy. The spring, summer, and autumn of each year were spent at different country-seats, and the winter in town, where Statira was universally admired, and the Count esteemed ; but in the country, she was almost adored by the tenants and the poor. Their domestic happiness was increased by the birth of three children, two daughters and a son.

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The serenity of Statira's mind added to her beauty, and tinged her cheeks with the bloom of health: their mutual love was mentioned as exemplary, for each succeeding day seemed to fasten the band that united their hearts still closer. It is true, the Countess perceived that the husband had sometimes little caprices, or humours, that had escaped her notice in the lover; but they were easily removed, and, by endeavouring to make his wishes her's, it seemed as if one mind inhabited two bodies.

But at the beginning of the fifth year, this amiable woman experienced that neither youth, riches, a guiltless heart, nor domestic peace could shield her from misfortune; for, within the space of a few months, she lost both her parents; events which, according to the common course of nature, she had reason to expect would have been protracted many years. The sorrow this reiterated loss occasioned, was heart-felt and severe; nor did the large fortune she became mistress of contribute in the least towards drying a tear, or lessening her affliction. She

resigned every thing to her husband, nor would she even permit him to augment the sum that was fixed at the time of her marriage for her private use, which she assured him was more than sufficient for her wants. Very little alteration was made in their manner of living ; their table, servants, and equipage remained nearly the same, and the only pleasure the increase of riches gave her, was that it enlarged her power of doing good.

Towards the end of the same year, just as the bitterness of her sorrow was beginning to abate, her heart was wounded anew by her husband being suddenly seized with a dangerous illness ; for a putrid fever of the most malignant kind brought him to the verge of the grave. However, the goodness of his constitution, assisted by the power of medicine, saved his life ; but his recovery was slow, for a langour and temporary alienation of reason, the not unusual consequences of his disorder, continued for a considerable time ; they were at last removed, or to speak more properly, seemed to be removed,
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for in fact, they were more apparently, than really so; for a depression of spirits, that soon degenerated into the most gloomy hypochondry, baffled all the efforts of art to remove it, and made him, who might be said to be seated in Fortune's lap, miserable, with a constitution to all appearances good, a mind capable of executing whatever he chose to attempt, and an abundance of every thing that could contribute towards making life agreeable. Count Harton was morose, melancholy, and inactive; nothing could satisfy his sullen caprices, nor enliven the gloom that corroded his mind: amongst the four estates he possessed, he chose that for his residence which was most analogous to his humour.

Harton Castle was an antique mansion, situated in a barren, remote, and mountainous part of the country. He never went to town, nor even admitted the visits of his neighbours, and his jaundiced eye regarded every social enjoyment that others shared with as much envy as a valetudinarian does a table covered

covered with dainties that he cannot partake of himself.

The Countess's situation was extremely painful during his illness. She had done all an affectionate wife could do to alleviate the sufferings of a husband she doated on; she had hardly ever left his bed-side, and had attended him day and night: his medicine and refreshments were administered by her, and when her attendants reminded her of her unnecessarily exposing herself to danger, and injuring her health, as they in her absence could do every thing she did, she always replied, "No! there is no person so nearly related to him as I am;—I will do my duty; let Providence dispose of me as it thinks fit." Even now, when almost every other female of her age and fortune would have resigned her splenetic husband to his gloom and ill-humour, and sought to amuse herself, the amiable Statira bore her fate without repining, and tried to accustom herself to his fretful whims. She left her friends and the society she was accustomed to adorn without a sigh, and without the least contradiction accompanied

accompanied her self-tormentor into the gloomy solitude he had chosen. When there, she did all in her power to enliven and amuse him; she would often read to him, or play, and sing his favourite airs, and often, with an aching heart, try to entertain him with cheerful conversation; but her attempts were usually received with the most frigid indifference, which she bore, as well as his sullen ill-temper, with the most angelic patience, and continued to flatter herself with the pleasing hope, that her endeavours would at last be attended with salutary effects; and if it was not in her power to heal, in every other respect, her worthy husband's mind entirely, she hoped at least to restore some degree of ease and comfort to it.

It is possible, and even probable, that her endeavours would have been crowned with success, if it had not been for the influence of a malicious fiend, who had secretly undermined the fabric of domestic felicity, and had succeeded so well, that he had sapped the very foundation of it before the Countess had the least suspicion of an enemy being near;

near.—But a little retrospection is necessary in this place to enable my readers to see clearer for the future.

CHAP. II.

THE Count had for a number of years a person constantly about him, whose name was Murden; he was a man capable of acting any part, for his heart was too obdurate to make any distinction between right and wrong; and a pretended attachment and fawning servility to his master, was the cloak that covered his mean and interested designs. He had formerly been the Count's valet-de-chambre, and at the same time the confident and abettor of most of his youthful excesses—a post that proved of infinite profit to him, for he disposed of his master's purse as he thought fit; but finding the land-steward's

steward's place still more advantageous, he easily prevailed on his master to give it him, which as soon as he was in possession of, he discovered the means of making himself so indispensibly necessary, that nothing could be done without him ; and, long accustomed to cringe where he expected to be a gainer, and be brutal to those under his command—he acted with despotic power, and ruled with an iron sceptre : he was his master's right-hand, but the scourge of the tenants, when the Count's marriage, which in all probability did not meet with his approbation, took place, and suddenly interrupted his career of power, —at least for some time.

Every virtue and amiable quality the Countess possessed was, to the unworthy favourite a fresh cause of fear and hatred ; but it will easily be supposed, that he took care to conceal his sentiments with the mask of hypocrisy : there was none of the Count's dependants that bowed so low, or uttered his congratulations in such obsequious terms as Murden ; none that so attentively studied to anticipate the Countess's wishes as he ; nor did

did he fail in those little arts of refined flattery and attention that seldom failed giving pleasure to a female heart ;—a rural entertainment, a dance, illumination or fire-works on her birth-day, the earliest and latest roses the season produced, the finest fruits, the rarest birds, and the prettiest lap-dogs, were projected, or presented, as a tribute of respect and attachment, by Mr. Murden.

But these, as well as various other attempts that he made to ingratiate himself into the Countess's favour, failed ; nor is it possible to account for her disliking a person who took such pains to please her : perhaps she knew more of her husband's former gallantries than he thought she did ; and, although she could easily excuse the errors of youth, she despised the man who, for the basest purposes, had encouraged them. Perhaps her guardian angel warned her to beware of him, or perhaps her good sense, and rectitude of mind, made her an exception to the general rule, and taught her to dislike flattery and flatterers : but, in short, she could not endure him, although complaisance to her husband made

her endeavour to conceal her aversion as much as possible, and she took particular care not to give him any offence, either with words or actions. But Murden was too quick-sighted not to discover what passed in her heart; that he was pained by it, that he regarded it as an unmerited persecution, and that he often thought how he might save, perhaps, revenge himself, is the common course of human nature, and hardly deserves a place in this relation.

But as long as the Count enjoyed his health, and his mind was at ease, Murden could do nothing but brood over his vexations in silent discontent; for the Countess so decidedly possessed the first place in his heart, and the confidence he placed in her was so unbounded, that every attempt to deprive her of it would have been an act of folly. By her advice, Harton determined to overlook his affairs himself, which he had never done before: his eyes were opened, and he made several alterations, and, by degrees, adopted principles that did him honour. Murden's power sunk daily, and he never, except in
matters

matters of trifling consequence, ventured to act of his own accord; and if any thing happened, that bore the least appearance of fraud or oppression, if a poor tenant or servant applied to his lady for redress, a single word of her's was sure to remedy it. Murden would then, with a look of surprise, humble bow, and rancorous heart, hasten to remove the cause of complaint, which, he always said, was owing to a mistake. At that time it would have been an easy matter for the Countess to have removed him entirely; yet why should she endeavour to hurt a man, who had not the power of injuring her, or any one? he seemed to her rather contemptible than dangerous.

But the Count's recovery made a prodigious change in Murden's favour, and soon restored to him his former influence over his master's mind. Whilst the Count's life was supposed in danger, and during the time his senses were deranged, Statira's attention was too much engaged with her husband's melancholy situation to pay any attention to Murden's proceedings, who, finding himself secure

secure from the observation of those he feared, made use of the favourable opportunity to commit a number of fraudulent actions, and his master's property, as well as the tenant's privileges, were laid under heavy contributions : nor had he any reason to fear ; for although the oppressed often applied to their former friend and benefactress for relief, yet so great was the anguish of her mind, that their petitions frequently remained unopened, and their complaints were forgotten as soon as they were out of sight. Besides, the assurance that one of the physicians gave him, that although the Count's life was out of danger, there was no hope of his ever recovering his senses, encouraged him in his security, and he fancied himself controuller and sole manager of the estates, which, according to the plan he formed, could not fail producing a golden harvest to him. But how great was his surprise, and with what terror did he awake from his pleasing dream, on the Count's returning from a short journey that the Countess had prevailed on him to take, with restored reason and amended health.

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Every hope, every pleasing expectation with which he had lulled his mind, suddenly fled from it, and were succeeded by terror and apprehension of the danger that awaited him. That he should be obliged to give an account of his stewardship was certain; that the most favourable decision he could possibly expect was his dismissal; and that he might think himself fortunate, if that happened without opprobrium. He recollected what the Countess had said to him at different times during her husband's illness; and it seemed to him a certainty, that she would be his chief accuser. In this dilemma, what was to be done? and how could he avoid the impending blow? After much consideration, he determined to risk every thing, and, by a bold attempt, try to reinstate himself into his master's favour; and chance, which often befriends the fool, and protects the villain, assisted his design, and encouraged him to proceed further than he himself at first intended.

Constant and violent exercise was recommended to the Count, as the best remedy for
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his lowness of spirits and hypochondriac complaint ; and, on the contrary, the Countess's health required quiet and repose. The anxiety and fatigue she had suffered during her husband's illness, had occasioned her premature delivery of a dead child, and her recovery was very slow. Much as she wished to do so, it was not in her power to accompany the Count when he went out, for it was impossible for her to support the jolting of the carriage or the fatigue of riding ; and after two or three trials, he not seeming to like his own company, and there being no other person that could go with him, desired Murchison to accompany him. The pleasure the invitation gave him may easily be imagined ; the last five years had not afforded him one that could be compared to it, and he knew so well how to make use of this favourable opportunity, that his company for the future was indispensable ; not only on account of his knowing how to flatter his master's whims, and accommodate himself to whatever humour he was in, for that he was accustomed to do ; nor by calumniating the neighbours, although

that was harmony to the Count's ear, as it encouraged him in his misanthropy. The method he chose seemed so simple, and yet it was so capacious, that at least Murden deserves the praise of having formed a plan that was not likely to fail.

CHAP. III.

THE discontented mind loves to dwell on the past; and restless fancy often delights in the recollection of scenes, that would be tiresome, or at least have little interest were they to be repeated. The traveller in particular loves to talk of his travels; it is therefore no wonder that Harton, in his present state of apathy and discontent, reflected with

with pleasure on the time when he in the bloom of youth wandered over the greatest part of Europe, and, with a mind at ease, viewed the different beauties that nature and art produced ; drank large draughts out of the fascinating cup of pleasure ; and enjoyed life in the most comprehensive sense of the word. At that time Murden was his constant companion, and knew more of his amusements and dissipations than any other person. These were the subjects he chose to expatiate on ; and when he found that the Count listened to him with attention, that his countenance suddenly cleared up ; that he took part in the conversation, or recommenced it after a pause ; that artful man was inexhaustable on the subject. Italy was the country the Count preferred ; he had remained longer in it than in any other, had had several amours there, and his vanity was not a little flattered by the appellation of *handsome foreigner* that had often been given him.

At Rome he had even bid defiance to the dagger of the banditti ; and had rivalled a nephew of his Holiness in the affection of

the most beautiful Signora there. Italy, but Rome in particular, was what Murden talked of most, and he saw with pleasure the rapid success of his scheme; for the Count listened to him with visible attention and satisfaction, and the gloom that furrowed his brow was frequently chased by a faint smile: fancy seemed to realize past scenes, and to recall to his mind the pleasure he felt at those happy times. Murden's plan seemed at first to be a beneficial one, and even the Countess approved the part of it she was informed of. But from that moment Murden was his only companion; the only person he would converse with, or whose judgment he could depend on: he was the only one that rightly comprehended his meaning, and his society made up to him the loss of every other; for he hardly ever spoke to his wife or children.

But, besides the satisfaction that recollection afforded, the secret wish of revisiting those countries, and enjoying a repetition of the same pleasures soon occupied his mind. Every day his dislike to his native country increased; the climate was cold, uncomfortable,
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able, unhealthy, and ill-suited for a constitution so delicate as his. A journey to Italy was the centre of his wishes; that, and nothing else would restore his health, and he longed to return to Italy with as much impatience as a child to get possession of a new toy. And when he expressed his wish to his bosom friend, as he sometimes did, he would generally reply in a tone between jest and earnest. "What prevents your going, Sir? you are young, rich, and your own master; you surely can go wherever you will, and do what you please, without being accountable for your actions to any person. Perhaps you are unwilling to go on the Countess's account? But you can take her with you—or perhaps if you was to mention it to her in a proper manner, she would have no objection to your going without her." The Count usually interrupted the harangue, and then remained silent and thoughtful for the next quarter of an hour, or talked of the weather, or some other uninteresting subject. It is a true but a melancholy observation, that one villain can easier corrupt ten honest minds, than

the same number can correct the principles of one vicious heart. The Count was entangled in Murden's snare, without his entertaining the least suspicion that one was laid for him; for he felt for the first time, although he had been married near six years, that a wife, even a good one, was a disagreeable incumbrance to a man. For it was impossible for him to revisit Italy in the manner he formerly did if he took her with him; nor did he believe she would consent to remain at home, as he knew she loved travelling, and had often expressed a wish to see Italy. Neither could he contrive any reason that he thought would be a sufficient excuse for thwarting her inclination; and to relinquish his darling plan on her account, provoked him, and erased from his memory the various obligations he owed her. Her invariable affection, the years of domestic happiness she had caused him, and the care and unwearied attention with which she had so lately attended him, even at the hazard of her own life—these, and every thing else, were entirely forgotten in his present thankless humour, or
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regarded as trifles by no means adequate to the constraint she occasioned him. These thoughts continually rankled in his mind, and every day he became more gloomy, peevish, and insupportable than the last : he avoided the sight of his wife as much as possible ; and although his heart frequently reproached him for doing so, he did not strive to amend his conduct.

Murden had now attained his wish, nay, more than he at first expected ; for he had regained his master's favour, and his power over him was more unbounded than ever, for he was certain, if ten complaints were made against him, nine of them would be disregarded, and either, through idleness or credulity, the decision of the tenth would be left to himself. He plainly perceived that the Countess had lost her influence, and that the weal and woe of the tenants and servants were in his hands, and that he could act without restraint. But that was not enough for him, for he determined to proceed still further ; and as he had lessened, not to rest till he had alienated, the Count's affection from his loved
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although ill-treated wife : and either through fear that the Countess might recover her power, or revenge for the disgrace she had formerly occasioned him, he formed the bold attempt of strewing the seeds of jealousy in Harton's mind, and endeavoured to persuade him of his wife's infidelity. It seems as if nothing could be more absurd than an accusation of that nature ; for the retirement the Countess lived in nearly equalled that of a nunnery, at a distance from all her former acquaintance, nor permitted to visit, or receive the visits of the neighbouring families. She saw no person except her husband, children, and servants ; her correspondence was limited to a few relations, and one or two young ladies, to whom she usually wrote three or four times a year. Envy itself could not have blackened Statira's spotless fame ; but what envy could not do, Murden could.

Among the different persons that composed the Count's household, there was one who distinguished himself above the rest, more on account of his integrity and abilities, than the comeliness of his person and the gentility

gentility of his manners. His father had served in the Countess's family as groom a great number of years, and was a particular favourite of her's, on account of his having saved both her parents' lives: the event happened before her birth, but her having frequently heard it repeated, had deeply impressed the remembrance of it on her grateful mind. Her parents were taking an airing in an open carriage; the horses took fright, and were on the brink of a steep precipice, which they would have inevitably plunged into the next step they took, if he had not had the presence of mind to shoot one of them. Count de B** rewarded him with a game-keeper's place, and took him, his wife, and infant son into his house. Statira was born a few months after, and the child was brought up with her and her brother's, was their play-fellow, and received the same education they did, till he was ten years old, when the Count sent him to a good grammar-school in a neighbouring town, thinking the instructions he would receive there would be more useful to him, than if
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he continued with his children. The event proved that the Count judged right; for Nelson, by unwearied application and study, made up for the loss of a classic education. The Count promised to fix him in whatever line of life he chose; but till a suitable opportunity offered, he desired him to remain in his family. A few months before Statira's marriage the house-steward died, and Nelson being still unprovided for, asked the Count to give him that place, which he consented to do till such time as he was better provided for. He had the offer of several advantageous situations afterwards, which the Count, who was truly his friend, urged him to accept of; but the ungrounded fear of seeming ungrateful to his benefactor, the wish to remain near his father, (his mother was dead) and his preferring a country to a town life, made him refuse it. After the death of Statira's parents, Harton said to him, that although the place he was going to offer him was by no means equal to the one he had a right to expect, yet as he was disengaged, he would be glad if he would resume the same charge

charge in his family as he had in his father-in-law's, and added that he likewise intended taking his father into his house. Nelson accepted the offer, and fulfilled the trust reposed in him with unremitting zeal and almost unexampled honesty; for he was the only one in the family who, against his own interest, endeavoured to preserve order and regularity, and to stem the torrents of confusion and discontent that were daily gaining ground.

It was impossible for a man of such a cast to be Murden's friend, and he trembled when he first heard of the Count's intention of taking a man of reputed abilities and probity into his house; particularly in the tottering state of favour he was in at that time, he was afraid he would prove to him what Mordacai was to Haman. However his mind was a little easier when he perceived that Nelson, notwithstanding his sense and learning, did not understand the art of insinuation, uttering gross flattery, or making a humble bow. But although he ceased to fear, he continued to hate the man he still considered

considered as his rival, and secretly rejoiced that the intended blow would strike two enemies at the same time.

That the Countess did not feel the least degree of affection for Nelson is certain, although it cannot be denied that she esteemed him more than any other person in her family ; that she expressed the satisfaction she felt when her husband proposed taking him into his service ; that she often spoke to him, at least oftener than to Murden ; that she sometimes asked his opinion of books, and once or twice sent a servant to town to fetch those he recommended ; that she once asked him the reason of his not marrying, and on his not giving her a satisfactory answer, she laughed at his confusion, and said she hoped to discover the secret of his heart some time or other ; and that during her husband's illness she sent for him two or three times into her dressing-room, and to the great mortification of her maid, who did not understand French, spoke to him in that language. These were facts that could not be denied ; and trifling as they may seem to an unprejudiced eye, they soon,
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in the light that Murden made them appear seemed to the Count "confirmations strong as proofs of holy-writ."

His first business was to seek for some persons, in whom he could confide, to assist him in the execution of his plan. He, alas! found them too soon; for although it may seem a reflection on human nature, yet truth obliges me to own, that the Countess had many private enemies amongst her domestics, and that her virtues and goodness were the causes of their being so; for although liberality was her chief delight, and gentleness and affability accompanied every thing she said or did, yet she was at the same time a prudent œconomist, and it was owing to her advice that the Count had made a number of alterations and reformatations in his family, by which they found themselves considerably the losers. But his present state of torpid inactivity had loosened the reins of restraint, and restored their former privileges to them, which they so highly prized that there was nothing they so much feared as being deprived of them again; they therefore

fore saw with pleasure the decline of the Countess's power, and determined to do all they could to prevent her regaining it. Besides no person knew better than Murden how to procure himself friends with the mammon of unrighteousness, and it will easily be supposed that he fixed on those for his assistants whose hearts were too callous to feel the stings of remorse or pity.

CHAP. IV.

I WILL not tire my readers with relating the whole system of calumny that he employed to poison the Count's mind: first, how lavish he was in the praise of the beauty of Nelson's person, insinuating manners, and the general

general approbation the fair sex bestowed on him ; he would then let drop a few words as if they escaped him unintentionally, of such an equivocal nature, that they were sure to rivet the Count's attention ; how he afterwards by anonymous letters and reports, that he caused to be circulated by his assistants, in a manner that was certain to reach the ear of him they were intended for ;—the pains he took to contradict those reports, by declaring them to be nothing but scandal, or idle tales invented by the neighbour's ;—by a copy of verses that he owned to be Nelson's writing, in which much was said of requited love ;—how as soon as the Count's attention was changed into suspicion, he at first affected surprise, then doubt, and ended with acting the part of a good-natured friend, who although convinced, is unwilling to own it : thus he, with a sigh and a shrug of the shoulders, said, that although appearances were certainly against the Countess, it was impossible for him to believe her guilty.—But suffice it to say that before the expiration of a month, Harton was not only, what he had long been,

as splenetic as a Briton, but likewise as jealous as an Italian.

Every word and look of his unsuspecting wife were construed into a crime; a smile was the sign of her having eluded his vigilance, and made an appointment with her lover; her looking serious was attributed to the contrary reason, and the most trifling question she asked him, was regarded as a snare to discover his intention. He would often lock himself in his room for whole days, and stand behind the Venetian-blinds to watch her going into, and returning from the garden, where, when the weather permitted, she usually walked two or three times a day. At other times he would not stir from her side, but would follow her wherever she went as close and silent as her shadow; would snatch up every scrap of written paper he saw, and would brood over the veriest trifles for hours together; but although he never found any thing that had the least relation to what he feared, yet he often fancied it had.

It was impossible for the Countess not to remark a behaviour so new and incomprehensible;

henfible ; but the real cause of it never once occurred to her. She had long been accustomed to her husband's caprices, gloom, and irritability, which she considered as the consequences of his illness, and had often in silent sorrow lamented his and her hard fate. She indeed began to fear that Murden's influence and instigations added to the acrimony of his humour, but she had not the least suspicion that his physical evil was increased by a new moral one ; and the thought of his being jealous never entered her guiltless mind. Often when he sat near her, silent, discontented, restless, and his fullen glances obliquely directed towards her, would she take hold of his hand, or throw her arms round his neck, and beg of him to tell her what was the matter with him, or if she could do any thing to relieve or amuse him. How greatly would he have relieved his mind at that time, and what anguish would he have prevented her's feeling afterwards, had he openly avowed his suspicions ! How easily could she have refuted them ; how gladly would she have accommodated herself to his

caprices, and, by removing the cause of his uneasiness, contributed all in her power towards restoring his lost repose.

But the Count was silent; and although the confidence he placed in his worthless minion was too great to admit his doubting her guilt, yet he was resolved not to mention it to her, till he had convincing proofs of it—proofs that she herself could not deny; and as soon as that happened, he was determined to speak to her in a manner she little expected. He unfortunately soon found an opportunity of putting his design into execution; and the manner of his doing so proved disgraceful to himself, and a source of never-ending woe to his amiable and much-injured wife.

The Countess's birth-day was towards the latter end of summer; and Murden (as was said before) never let that day pass without projecting some little rural entertainment. The Count's illness had prevented its being celebrated the year before, and it was determined that this year should make up for that omission. Murden was consulted as usual about planning the *fête*, and a short dramatic

entertainment was what he advised. "But," said he, "you had better speak to Nelson about it, for he understands matters of this kind better than I do, and perhaps he will write something proper for the occasion ;—if he will, that will be best of all ; I will take care to order the rest." His advice was followed, and the unsuspecting Nelson was caught in the trap that was set for him. His vanity was flattered by the compliment paid him ; for his passion was writing verses ; and a short piece that consisted of some dialogue adapted to the capacity of the performers, a few songs, and a concluding dance, was soon finished. But the best part of it was reserved for the last ; it was a poetic address to the Countess, to be spoken by himself by way of epilogue at the end of the entertainment. Productions of that kind are frequently without the least degree of merit ; but although the poet may fail in imagination, diction, or rhyme, he never does in praise ; and if the person to whom it is addressed is a lady, the idea of rosy cheeks, coral lips, dove-like eyes, nymph-like form, and angelic smiles so naturally

occur, that few or none can help paying a compliment to the beauties of her person, as well as those of her mind. In all probability Nelson expressed himself in the same manner; ~~and~~ the Countess was so young, handsome, ~~and~~ accomplished, that much could be said in her praise without descending to flattery: but that the whole was meant as neither more nor less than a polite compliment, was so plain, that nothing but premeditated malice, or blind suspicion could give it another construction. The latter was the Count's case, for every word that Nelson uttered he fancied a declaration of love; and every smile and mark of approbation the Countess gave, a public avowal of her guilt.

The Count remained motionless in his chair for some moments after Nelson had left the stage, with his eyes fixed on the spot he had just quitted, and the Countess with some difficulty roused him from his stupor, by her repeatedly asking him, how he liked the piece? if he did not think, the flattery excepted, that it was a very tolerable production? and if the actors had not performed their parts
exceedingly

exceedingly well? He at last started from his chair; looked at her in a furious manner; was going to give vent to his rage, but suddenly recollecting himself, he determined to wait till he saw what followed, and turned from her with a peevish and sarcastic ^{look} "Very well! O very well indeed!"

The festivity of the day always ended with a Ball; the Countess usually went down a dance with each of the upper servants without distinction; and before she left the room, she never failed making a genteel present to the person that had planned the entertainment, as a mark of her gratitude for his attention. Murden had received several presents from her on similar occasions, amongst the rest a handsome snuff-box, gold-headed cane, and a ring of value; but that Nelson, as the author of the play, was entitled to the prize that evening, did not in her opinion admit of a doubt; and as he respectfully led her to her seat at the conclusion of the dance, she presented a plain gold watch to him with these words—"I beg you will accept of this as a mark of my esteem, and as a trifling

reward for the trouble you obligingly took on my account." A civil thing was hardly ever said in a manner less likely to give offence to the most suspicious mind, than what the Countess said to Nelson; and his reply, that the watch would always remind him of one of the happiest days of his life, was a polite manner of expressing his thanks, and nothing more. But it appeared in a very different light to the Count, and this seemed to him the moment he had waited for so long; he sprang from his chair, rushed towards them, and striking the watch out of Nelson's hand, rudely pushed away the Countess, and exclaimed in the most furious manner—"No! worthless woman, this is too much; at least you shall not reward and encourage your infamous paramour in my sight!" The terrified Countess looked at her husband—"My Lord," said she, "for God's sake what is the matter with you?" But he, without attending to her words, continued to utter all that rage dictated, and to load her with imprecations and abuse. The music stopped, the dance ended, and the astonished servants crowded about

about them, unable to guess the reason of so strange an interruption. But their presence did not check the violence of his passion; it rather seemed to increase it, and he seemed pleased at having so many witnesses. He ordered Nelson to get out of his sight, and the Countess to go to her own room, and not to leave it without his permission; and when she sunk almost lifeless into her maid's arms, he, with a contemptuous laugh, ordered her to carry her mistress away if she was not able to walk; nor did he rest till she (after several fruitless attempts to speak to him) left the room; and then after exposing himself to the ridicule of the whole family, by a conduct that even the greatest provocation would not have excused, and which the present trifling reason made absolute folly, he went away himself grumbling and swearing, and wishing every person in the room at the devil.

After the events of the evening, it will easily be supposed what a dreadful night the Countess passed: indeed it is almost a wonder that she survived it. Her mind, as she owned to a friend some time after, was
easier

easier that day than it had been for several months before :—the load of woe that had oppressed it so long, seemed removed ; and the entertainment, which she regarded as a testimony of her servant's affection, had amused and even enlivened her. Little did she think that her transient pleasure would be interrupted by a scene not only unexpected, unmerited, and humiliating, but one that would rob her of honour, character, and every thing she prized. She was at first inclined to think her husband's strange behaviour was a return of frenzy ; but when she considered how connected, although unjust—how deliberately severe, although devoid of truth his words were ; when she reflected on his late behaviour, and compared it to his former, and recollected some speeches that, at the time they were uttered, seemed devoid of meaning, the illusion ceased, and she saw a jealous and incensed husband surrounded by a number of mean and officious mischief-makers, whose interest it was to fan the flame of discord ; her till now spotless fame irrecoverably lost, and every hope of happiness fled

fled for ever. These were the thoughts that continually occupied her mind, and whichever way she turned them, a dark and gloomy prospect presented itself to her view.

CHAP. IV.

THE dreaded and yet wished-for morn, that would in some measure decide the Countess's fate, at length arrived: she sent her waiting-maid very early to enquire after her husband's health. She soon returned with a countenance that might have passed for a title-page of ill tidings, and the account she brought was as follows:—The Count had sat up the greatest part of the night, and consulted with Murden; that he had just locked himself in his room, and given orders that he would not be disturbed by any one; that
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at the dawn of day he had sent orders to the two Nelsons to leave his house before evening, and had sent the father a year's, and the son a half-year's wages, which the latter had returned with honest pride; that every one pitied the Countess, and blamed the Count, and that it was whispered in the family that his strange infatuation was owing to Murther's insinuations. The Countess was silent; but after a few moment's reflection, she seated herself, and wrote a short letter to her husband, in which she said all that injured and offended virtue dictated. She desired him to allow her a few minutes' hearing; but alone and without being influenced either by passion or prejudice; she begged him to make the strictest enquiry into her former conduct, and consented to the severest punishment if he found she had ever deviated from the duty she owed him. But till that was proved, she conjured him, in the most pathetic terms, not to take another step that would reflect dishonour on her character, or his own. She concluded with the assurance of her innocence in a manner that would have
been

been sufficient to prove it to an unprejudiced mind ; for her stile, although affectionate, was not humble ;—it was not forgiveness, but investigation of her conduct that she required. She sent the letter, and received the following answer a few minutes after :—

“ That your letter is very well written, cannot be denied ; but it is a pity that it does not contain a syllable of truth.

“ HARTON.”

This laconic note was sent unsealed ; and to add to her mortification, it was written by Murden, and only signed by the Count.

It is impossible to express what the Countess felt at that moment ; for this fresh indignity pained her more than any of the former had done. A flood of tears that at last kindly came to her relief, a little abated the anguish of her mind ; but it was above an hour before she recovered fortitude enough to determine what steps she should next take. She at last resolved to go to the Count herself ; but was not admitted into his presence ;—“ He had ordered her yesterday not to leave her room ; but if she chose to dine with him, she might,” was the message he sent by Murden.

She

She determined to do so ; and painful as the effort was, she dressed and went down to dinner.

The Count was sullen and silent ; she spoke to him several times, but his answers were monosyllables, and those uttered in so low a voice that it was hardly possible to hear them. But her altered looks seemed to afford him a malicious kind of pleasure ; and he smiled a ghastly smile whenever he saw her give away her plate without tasting the contents of it. As soon as the servants were withdrawn, she, before he was aware of her intention, caught hold of his hand, and held it so fast, that he could not easily extricate it. She insisted on his going into the garden with her ; he at first refused doing so, but on her declaring that she would not leave him till he had heard her, he at last granted her request ; but neither her prayers, caresses, nor repeated entreaties to enquire into her conduct were sufficient to move his stubborn heart ; and, “ it was very well,” and “ he knew what he knew,” were the cold and unsatisfactory answers she received

received to every thing she said. He at last left her with these words—"I shall never interfere in the affairs of your heart, but decency ought to prevent your letting me be an eye-witness of them." And when he was at a little distance from her, he turned back, and added the following insult—"Apropos, don't forget to take leave of your lover!—I suppose you know you are to lose him this evening!"

Thus passed the interview on which her only hope depended, and with a heart ready to burst at the thought of her not having been able to remove the base imputation she laboured under, but at the same time determined never voluntarily to expose herself again to an humiliation of the same kind as that she had just experienced. She returned to her apartment, where another trial of a painful nature awaited her: it was a message from the elder Nelson, requesting she would permit him to take leave of her. She hesitated a few moments if she should grant it or not: conscious innocence advised her to do so, but the reflection that she might thereby irritate her

her husband still more, prevented her; and alledging an indisposition as an excuse for not seeing him, she sent him some money with her wishes for his welfare. He held the money in his hand, and looked stedfastly at it for some time, and then said—"How glad I should be to see her once more before I die—but it cannot be." He then laid the money upon the table, and wiping away the tears that rolled down his furrowed cheeks, left the room. The Countess was violently affected when she heard this account, and said, with uplifted hands—"Gracious Heaven! impute not his tears to me, nor to my unhappy husband!" She then went into her closet, where she remained the rest of the day.

From that time that amiable woman's domestic and innate peace was irrecoverably lost. She never saw her husband except at meals, and then he was either laconic, sarcastic, or sullen. His chief amusement was hunting; Murden never failed accompanying him, and the party was sometimes increased by two or three persons he introduced, whose minds nearly resembled his own; and who

who, for the sake of a good dinner, did and said whatever their patron chose. The Countess sometimes offered to go with them; but some excuse or other was always framed to prevent her going. She likewise made several attempts to regain her husband's confidence and love, but they were received either with mortifying indifference, or repulsed in such a contemptuous manner, that every fruitless endeavour proved a fresh wound to her bleeding heart; and a just estimation of her own worth, and the duty she owed herself, made her frequently determine not to make another trial. When she walked out, or took an airing in the carriage, spies were sent after her to watch her steps: at home she was a mere cypher, for she had not the least power in her family, and her interceding in behalf of any person was sure to do them more harm than good; for her interesting herself in their favour, never failed being accounted to them as a crime. If she spoke to a servant in a more friendly manner than usual, they were sure to be discharged, as well as those that treated her with the respect that

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was

was due to her, and their places filled by Murther's creatures. Her solitary apartment was her only place of refuge, and her children and books her only comfort and amusement; and even they were frequently embittered by the envenomed tongue of slander that followed her wherever she went.

The Countess had too much penetration not to foresee what would be the consequences of the scene that happened in the presence of so many witnesses, and her fears were too soon realized; for the rupture between her and her husband soon circulated in the neighbourhood, and was the topic of conversation at every tea-table within ten miles of the castle. And as report, like a snow-ball, increases in size the further it goes, the late event did not fail being exaggerated and altered by every new relater; and although there were some few that pitied the Countess, yet the number of those that censured and condemned her was by far the greatest: and if many blamed the Count for making the affair so public, and called his doing so improper and ill-bred, yet few or none of those that composed

composed the genteeler circles, believed that his suspicion was entirely void of foundation; and many a beauty that had formerly been eclipsed by the Countess's superior charms, and beaux that had exhausted their stock of flattery to her in vain, or prudes that judged of others by themselves, found it very natural that a young, healthy, and lively person, who lived in such close retirement, should prefer the handsome steward to the sickly, cross, and capricious lord; but most of them blamed her more for incautiously betraying herself, than for the commission of her supposed crime. Nor did the Countess's (till now) blameless conduct screen her from reproach; for it is a melancholy reflection, but one that naturally occurs, that although an unblemished reputation is the greatest blessing a mortal can enjoy, yet it does not always prove an advantage to those that possess it, as it often causes envy, and excites suspicion, which, if once awakened, never fails sharpening the sting of slander; and even rigid moralists owned, that although they believed her innocent, they could not deny, that she

had failed in not paying some regard to appearances ; whilst others drew the most unjust and ill-natured conclusions from the submission she had shewn at first, and the patience of her subsequent behaviour. These and a thousand other aspersions of the same kind were reported to her by her attendants ; who by Murden's order repeated to her every thing they heard with many additions of their own ; for that vile and despicable wretch knew how much the knowledge of these reports would pain her, and to add to her sorrow was the greatest pleasure his diabolical heart was capable of feeling. She at last confined herself entirely to the house and garden, for if she went out, she fancied that every eye, that was directed towards her, darted a reproach ; and the friendly salutation of an honest peasant was regarded as a sneer of derision or contempt. Thus passed two tedious uncomfortable months : she thought it was impossible to be unhappier than she was, but she was soon convinced of her mistake.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

THE Countess had three female attendants to wait on her person ; and although she was a kind and indulgent mistress to them all, yet there was one, whose name was Hester, that she particularly distinguished with her favour. She was a poor girl that had been bred up in want and indigence ; for her father, a poor labourer that worked on the Count's estate, could hardly earn sufficient to purchase bread for his numerous family. The Countess had taken the girl, when merely a child, into her service ; had been at the expence of educating, and having her taught

every thing that was necessary for a female in the station she intended her for ; and as the girl had good natural sense and a quick comprehension, the progress she made pleased the Countess, and induced her to do more for her than she at first intended. She herself in happier times had taught her music and drawing, and as she placed an unbounded confidence in her, and treated her in every respect more like a friend than a servant, she had frequently, in the hour of distress, sought to relieve her mind by complaining to her. But Hester soon forgot the obligations she owed to the best of women, and repaid her benefactress's bounty with the blackest ingratitude. It is not unlikely that a report which at that time was circulated in the family, of Hester's being in love with Nelson, and of his either not returning her passion, or doing so in a faint and equivocal manner, being true: but however that may be, it is certain she could not conceal the vexation his discharge gave her ; and if the cause of her subsequent behaviour was owing to her really believing that inclination for the Countess made

made him blind to her charms; or if she regarded her as the cause of his dismissal, and hated her on that account; or if it was owing to Murden's instigations and promises; or if she was mean and wicked enough to respect her mistress less, because others did so—is not easy to say; but all at once the civil, attentive, and humble Hester became haughty, assuming, insolent, and even dishonest, as well as gossiping, and mischievous. If an unguarded expression ever escaped the Countess in Hester's hearing, that could be construed into a reflection on her husband or his unworthy favourite, she was sure to hear it repeated the next day in a manner that added insult to contempt; and when the Countess reproached her for it, she replied in so saucy a manner that it would have turned meekness itself into rage. The Countess, more irritated at her ingratitude than she had ever been in her life, ordered her to leave her presence and the house immediately, to which she answered, with a contemptuous smile, that she was not afraid of getting ano-

ther place. She left the Castle on Monday evening, and returned the next day by the Count's, or rather his prime minister's, order as house-keeper: a worthy old woman who had filled that place many years, and whose only fault was not taking part against her mistress, was sent away at a minute's warning, to make place for her.

The Countess had bore many indignities with almost unequalled fortitude and patience, but this new insult which must degrade her in the opinion of the lowest servant, was more than she could endure; and she determined to embrace the first opportunity that offered, to come to an explanation with her husband; for to continue to live in the manner she did at present was impossible. A few days after, the Count, although not civil, seemed rather less ill-humoured than usual, and after dinner when he returned to his apartment, Statira followed him into it, without his making any violent opposition to her doing so. When there, she spoke to him in a more resolute and determined manner than
ever

ever she had done before ; although perhaps it would have been better for her if she had adopted that method sooner :—she expatiated on her innocence, her sorrow, the various mortifications she was daily exposed to, and particularly that she had lately endured, with a warmth and energy that seemed to touch his stubborn heart. He was silent, but listened to her with attention, which encouraged her to proceed ; and vainly hoping that the happy hour was at length arrived that she had so long and so ardently wished for, she thought the best use she could make of it would be to open his eyes in regard to Murden, as she could produce various incontestible proofs of the frauds he had lately committed. But the bare mention of his name put the Count into a passion that bordered on frenzy : reproach followed reproach, and abuse abuse, and he asserted, with the most solemn oaths, that he was not only convinced of her former guilt, but that he knew the villain Nelson still continued to saunter about the castle in the evenings, and that he had great reason to suppose that she

she carried on a correspondence with him ; that he was a fool for treating her with so much lenity, and allowing her to enjoy the freedom she did ; but he was determined, and a dreadful oath accompanied his threat, if she ever ventured to oppose his will in the least, or uttered a word against the man he esteemed, the only honest servant he had, and perhaps his only friend, he would adopt other measures, and either hurl the serpent he had so long nourished in his bosom from him entirely, or place her in a close confinement, where she would be deprived of the possibility of injuring him again. The Countess, in an agony of grief that exceeds description, even knelt to him, and begged of him to listen to her only a few minutes ; but her prayers and tears were equally ineffectual ; and as she attempted to clasp her arms about his knees, he tore himself from her with such violence that she fell to the floor. She at last left the room with the fixed determination, let the consequences be what they would, to break her chain as soon as possible.

But

But let no one censure the Count or Countess with precipitation or asperity; for the former was not a barbarian, although he may appear so at first sight—he was an unhappy misguided man, a tool in the hands of a villain that used the power he had over him for the basest purposes; and let those that are inclined to blame his credulity, remember, that a sickly constitution often occasions a debility of understanding, and that apathy and peevishness, the usual attendants of illness, naturally render the weakened mind susceptible and suspicious, open to fraud, and inclined to jealousy; and that the fawning sycophant who makes a proper use of such opportunities, seldom fails gaining his purpose. This may be offered as some excuse for the Count's conduct, but surely much more may be said in the Countess's favour. A patient endurance of unmerited injuries, although it may be suffered long, will weary at last, and is always limited to a certain point; but tried beyond that, the weaker sex often exceed the stronger in stability and resolution; and if we consider the Countess's unhappy fate

fate, and what she had already endured, we shall not be surpris'd to find that her patience was exhausted at last;—confined in a gloomy castle, deprived of all society, suspected and ill-treated by her husband—the man she had married for love, whom she still loved, and for whose sake she had willingly made such great and voluntary sacrifices—to whom she had never given the least offence, nor injured even in thought. First tormented with his ungrounded jealousy, then treated either with indifference, contumely, or contempt; watched, suspected, calumniated; a mark set up for envy to shoot at; without a single friend to whom she could apply for comfort or advice; and if the present time was insupportable, the prospect of futurity was still worse; obliged to support the presence of the worthless wretch, whom she knew was the cause of her misfortunes—his sneers and malignant looks, that plainly expressed the satisfaction he felt, who countermanded her orders in her hearing, and seem'd as if he would soon oblige her to obey him;—if these circumstances are rightly weigh'd, it would be impossible

possible for any one to blame the Countess for thinking herself in a dungeon, or to accuse her of levity for determining to free herself from it as soon as she could.

Neither had she much time for consideration, as the winter was approaching with hasty strides, which even deprived her of the trifling recreations she had hitherto enjoyed ;—that, and the Count's threatening to confine her still more closely, made her determine to leave her dreary prison as soon as possible. Amongst the men servants there was one who seemed more attached to her interest than the rest, and as she was obliged to have one to assist her flight, she disclosed her intention to him. He facilitated her design by procuring her a carriage and horses ; and one dark and rainy night, after all the family were retired to rest, she, her eldest daughter, and a waiting-maid, stole down the back-stairs, and escaped through the garden ; she took nothing with her but a little linen, her family jewels, and what she had saved of her last year's pin-money.

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Many persons were afterwards inclined to believe that the Count, or those that acted for him, knew her intention, and connived, or at least did not make any attempt to prevent it. The supposition does not seem to be quite devoid of foundation, for her absence was not remarked till the next noon, and then no enquiries were made about her, nor a pursuit of the fugitives thought of. How many regrets would the Countess have spared herself, if she had not fancied the methods, that would be adopted on her evasion, would be entirely different to what they were; for it was her design to be overtaken, and had formed her plan accordingly; and she felt the most cruel disappointment at finding that last, that only hope frustrated.

At first the Countess did not know what course to take, and was almost tempted to return home again; but a little reflection made her relinquish an intention which would indeed have been the height of imprudence; and she resolved to go to an aunt she had at D**, and beg of her to
favour

favour her with her protection and advice. She did so; but did not meet with the reception she expected. The old lady was what is generally termed a good sort of woman;—she used to be very fond of her niece Statira, and in fact still loved her; but she was one, who not only paid a strict regard to propriety, appearances, and reputation; but was at the same time a slave to custom, form, and prejudice. The report of the Countess's domestic broils had reached her ear, and what she had heard was most likely not to the Countess's advantage; she was therefore extremely shocked at her unexpected appearance; and her travelling in a hired carriage, without her usual attendants, were circumstances ill calculated to remove her doubts; and she shook her head, and looked very much displeased when she heard from whence she came, and the reason of her visit. The Countess informed her of the whole affair in such an artless and open manner, that she was convinced of her innocence, but she persevered, with steadfastness, or rather obstinacy in declaring she had

acted wrong, and that no provocation ought to be great enough to induce a young lady of rank and fortune to leave her family. She then moralized a good deal on the necessity of accommodating oneself to a husband's humours; refused to listen to any objections that were offered; and concluded with assuring her niece, that although she was welcome to remain at her house a day or two to rest herself, she must insist on her returning home. For what would the world say if she remained with her? Would it not seem as if she approved of the step she had taken? Besides if her husband insisted on her going back, which seemed very likely, it was impossible that she could oppose him, or protect her.

CHAP. VII.

WE never feel pain more acutely, than when we hear the violence of it doubted ; nor do we ever so obstinately persevere in thinking ourselves in the right, as when any one endeavours to persuade us we are in the wrong ; and exactly in this manner did the old lady's frigid morals operate on the Countess's mind ; for the pain, the remembrance of the unworthy treatment she had received, and the mortifications she had endured, equalled, if not exceeded that the reality had given her ; and she was determined, that neither persuasions nor threats

should prevail on her to return to her husband, without his having first signed some conditions, without which, she was determined never to trust herself in his power again. But her aunt's supposition, that he would insist on her returning, and perhaps use force to make her do so, terrified her, and made her resolve to escape from farther persecution. She, however, concealed her intention from her aunt; and after listening to her arguments for some time, seemed convinced of the propriety of them; but said, before she returned home, she was determined to go to N**, and speak to a gentleman, a near relation of her husband's, who lived there, and desire him to be the mediator between them. Madame de L** thought her doing so an unnecessary precaution; but finding her niece's resolution fixed, she was obliged to acquiesce. The next morning the Countess took leave of her, and went to N**, but she only changed horses there, and then pursued her journey without stopping, till she arrived at Dresden, where she purposed remaining for the present; and af-

ter consulting some gentlemen of the law, she wrote a long and explicit letter to her husband, in which she informed him, in a plain and determined manner, of every particular that she wished, but was not allowed, to relate to him in their last interview: she desired that impartial judges might examine her conduct, and that they might settle the unhappy difference that suspicion had occasioned; but she declared, that although a reconciliation was what she ardently wished, the first step towards it must be, his discharging the unworthy person to whose base machinations their unfortunate disagreement was owing; and she offered to return as soon as he had left the house. She added that she did not doubt of her being able to convince him, that she had never swerved from the duty she owed him and her children; that she still loved him as well as at the moment she gave him her hand at the altar; and that there was nothing she so much wished as his believing her to be his constant and affectionate wife.

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That the Countess acted inconsiderately, and that most of the measures she adopted, were rather the result of precipitation than prudence, cannot be denied ; for she certainly would have avoided making the affair so public, had she taken time to consider, or had had a friend to advise her. But although she erred, she did so unintentionally ; and the agonies she had endured before she left her husband's house ; the rash step she had taken to free herself from them ; the coolness with which she was treated by the person, from whom she expected to receive consolation and advice ; terrified at the thought that instead of breaking her chain, she had forged herself new ones, and rendered suspicious by the repeated injuries she had received : these reasons, and her entire ignorance of the forms of law, urged her to commit the very faults she wished to avoid, and made appearances more against her than ever.

But that which did her the greatest injury, was her going to so great a distance, and which in fact was quite unnecessary ; for it
offended

offended several of her relations, who would willingly have afforded her the protection her aunt denied; irritated the latter who accused her niece of duplicity and art; opened a wide field for scandal to range in; and barred the possibility of a reconciliation between her and her husband, who was now more fully persuaded than ever of her guilt.

The Countess's written declaration, as will easily be supposed, had not the wished-for effect; for her husband regarded it as an insult, which determined him to sue for a divorce; and the endeavours of the Countess's relations, as well as those of his own, to settle the difference in an amicable manner, proved vain; as did a second attempt of the Countess (who after her first fright was a little abated, returned to her native country, and placed herself under the protection of a near relation). She represented to him in her second letter, the different circumstances that had given him offence, in so plain and distinct a manner, that it was impossible for any person, except himself, not to be convinced by the truth and clearness of her reasonings.

But they had no effect on the Count ; for he remained obstinately attached to his opinion, and a law-suit, suing for a divorce, was commenced by him.

The manner of his acting in this affair was as ungenerous as his former conduct had been ; for the grounds on which he founded his plea, were, suspicion of adultery, and premeditated elopement. Had he acted with more delicacy, the Countess, when she found all hopes of a reconciliation over, would undoubtedly have consented to a separation ; but attacked as she was, she was obliged to contend as well as she was able, to vindicate her character, and to prove the malice as well as falsehood of the accusation. The consciousness of her innocence made her fancy she should not find any difficulty in doing so, particularly as the original cause of their misunderstanding was a mere trifle, which she thought she could easily obviate, and oblige her accusers to own the power of truth : she in idea enjoyed the satisfaction she should feel in triumphing over them ; and anticipated the pleasure forgiving them
would

would afford her. But, alas ! the Countess did not find the proving her innocence so easy as she imagined ; for a number of circumstances, that were partly unknown to her, and chiefly the inventions of her enemies, were stated as facts, and were of a nature that made it impossible for her to contradict them. Amongst the rest, there were witnesses who offered to swear they had seen Nelson go up the back stairs, that led to the Countess's apartment, at midnight ; several copies of verses were produced, that appeared to be Nelson's writing, in which the happiness of reciprocal love was expatiated on, and the object of his affection mentioned as a person of elevated rank ; and letters, said to be intercepted, after he had left the family, in which he thanked the Countess for her goodness, and the many favours she had conferred on him ; couched in terms that certainly admitted of a double construction. These accusations were in all probability fabrications of Murden's brain ; fables invented to foment the jealousy he had caused, and were rejected by the impartial judges

as merely presumptive, and of too trifling a nature to be attended to in an affair of such consequence ; but they greatly injured the Countess's character, and many persons that before doubted of her guilt, were now convinced of it. These new and unexpected mortifications pained and perplexed her exceedingly ; for through a vexatious combination of circumstances, it was as impossible for her to refute these charges, as it was for her opponents to prove them : for young Nelson, the only person that could have done so effectually, was not to be found, and every possible means that was taken to discover where he was, proved without effect. The only information that could be gained of him was, that his father died at L** a few weeks after his dismissal ; and that as soon as he was buried, the son had left the town. He could be traced no farther with certainty ; but various reports said a number of different things about him : some, that he went from thence to Hamburgh, where he embarked in a trading vessel bound to North America ; and others, that he went on board an English
ship

ship that was wrecked on the coast of Yarmouth. The manner of his disappearing was romantic enough; but it proved unfortunate for the Countess's defence, and the vindication of her honour.

Harton, finding it impossible to prove his wife's infidelity, was at last, although reluctantly, obliged to alter his plea to irreconcilable hatred, owing to her having privately left his house; and the Countess, persuaded that after what had passed, mutual confidence and love could never again take place between them, made no further opposition, and a divorce took place.

As neither of them was either avaricious or interested, whatever related to their fortune or division of effects, was soon adjusted to their mutual satisfaction. But there was another division to be made, that it was impossible for them ever to agree in. The Countess was mother!—mother of three children that she loved with the most maternal affection. She had taken her eldest daughter with her, and had reluctantly left the others behind; but their tender age, the
fear

fear of endangering their health by exposing them to the night-air, and the inconveniences attending travelling at that inclement season, had induced her to do so.—And who was to have the children, was the contested point. The Countess thought she had a right to the daughters, who usually fall to the mother's share in cases of this kind; nor did she imagine the Count had a right, nor that he would even attempt to oppose her wish in this respect; and she was the more inclined to believe what she wished, as she knew he doated on his son, but had never shewn any particular fondness for his daughters. It therefore seemed probable to her that he would be glad to get rid of them, and willingly resign the trouble of their education to her. But she was mistaken; and it is impossible to guess what Harton's motive was for opposing her in this respect—if it proceeded from affection to his children, or hatred to his wife, that made him determine to thwart her every wish. But he insisted on having all the children; and the terms he made use of to enforce his claim were—he believed they were his; and that

that he would never consent to let any of his children remain with a mother that had voluntarily abandoned two of them. The Countess's fortitude and presence of mind, that had so often supported her on various trying occasions, entirely forsook her when she heard of the Count's declaration. She begged, she entreated him to grant her request; and when that failed, she again proposed a reconciliation, and even offered to return to him without making any conditions. But her endeavours were vain; for the incensed Count rejected her offers with disdain, and declared that he would abide by the decision of the law:—that decided in his favour; and the unhappy Countess was obliged to resign her eldest daughter to him.

The parting from her darling child cost her a thousand tears; she folded her to her bosom with anguish and love. "Alas, my dear child," said she; "must—Oh! must we part!—Could I have foreseen the anguish I this moment feel, I would have borne the accumulated wrongs I have suffered without repining; nor would any selfish motive have been
powerful

powerful enough to have induced me to take the unfortunate step that separates me from all my soul holds dear." Shen then embraced her again; and added, with a voice that tears rendered almost inarticulate, " But I feel our separation will not be an eternal one;—we shall meet!—yes, we shall meet again!"

As soon as the law-suit was over, the Count returned with his children to his solitary castle; and continued to vegetate there, in his usual state of inactivity, for some months. But he at last recollected his former plan of revisiting Italy and the South of France; and as there was nothing to prevent his putting it into execution, he determined to do so as soon as possible. Murden, and the other mercenary beings that surrounded him, encouraged, and secretly rejoiced at his design; but the former was undetermined whether he should accompany the Count on his tour, or remain at home, and be viceroy during his absence. Both promised to be profitable to him, and his wavering resolution alternately fixed on the one and the other, as long as it was possible to

to do so ; but it at last determined on the latter.

The Count placed his children under the care of a distant relation, a widow lady who lived at Berlin, that had consented to take the charge of them during his absence. She was a sensible and accomplished woman, and the Count had, in the early part of his life, lived on an intimate and friendly footing with her and her husband ; but he had not seen her since his marriage ; and it is immaterial whether motives of friendship, or those of interest induced her to grant his request.—Harton was extremely glad that he had settled this point, or at least got rid of the trouble it occasioned him ; and he set off himself a few days after his children's departure, elate with the sanguine hope of finding a renewal of youth and health in his beloved Italy, where he proposed remaining two or three years at least ; and he never thought of returning to his frigid uncomfortable native country without shuddering. His thoughts were so much engaged with the happiness that awaited him there, that he pursued his
4 journey

journey with the greatest speed, without paying much attention to the objects that surrounded him, or the beautiful country through which he travelled. He arrived at L**, in Switzerland, without meeting with any thing to impede his haste, or engage his thoughts, and was preparing to leave that town with his usual haste—the haste that the restless mind, that expects to find repose and comfort in change of place, always feels, when an incident, trifling in itself, but one that made a deep, although not lasting, impression on his mind, obliged him to alter his purpose, and remain there longer than he intended:—It was his unexpectedly meeting with an old friend, whom he had not seen since he quitted the university where they studied together, at the inn where he stopped to change horses; and although Harton hated and shunned company as much as possible, yet the sight of a person with whom he had formerly been intimately acquainted, afforded him a faint ray of pleasure. Monsieur de N** briefly informed him of his present situation, and what had happened to him since they parted; and
concluded

concluded with telling him, that the reason of his coming to L** was to visit a sister that had lately taken the veil in a convent near that town; and he pressed the Count, who had previously informed him that he was going to Italy for the recovery of his health, to remain a few days with him at L**, and to accompany him to the convent. Harton was secretly vexed at the delay; but it was impossible, without being guilty of absolute rudeness, to refuse his request; and he at last, with a reluctance that he endeavoured to conceal as well as he could, consented to delay his journey for two days. Clara was one of the many victims of family pride who are sacrificed to enrich the other parts of their family; and although her brother, who was extremely fond of her, had done all in his power to prevail on his father to alter his intention, neither his entreaties nor Clara's tears were powerful enough to move his obdurate heart; and the unfortunate Clara, in the bloom of youth, was doomed to pine and languish away her sad life in a dark and gloomy convent. Harton was not insensible to her sorrows, particularly when

when he heard that, in addition to her other woes, she had been obliged to sacrifice affection to duty; and that her lover was an amiable young man, who wanted nothing but fortune to have rendered her the happiest of her sex. He found a melancholy pleasure in conversing with her; and, at the conclusion of his first visit, he asked her permission to wait on her again with her brother the next day. His request was granted, and they repeated their visit at an early hour the next afternoon. Whilst they waited in the parlour for Clara's arrival, the Count's eyes wandered about the room, and at last fixed on a picture that hung against the wall, which he attentively surveyed for some time. It represented a young woman clad in a coarse woollen garment, who was carried by an angel down a steep precipice; there was a castle stood on the top of it, from which she seemed to be falling; her face, although pale, was extremely beautiful, and strongly expressive of innocence and modesty. Harton asked his friend if he knew the subject of the picture? he replied in the negative; but said he

he supposed his sister did, and that he would ask her as soon as she came down. She appeared at the grate whilst they were speaking; and as soon as the first compliments were passed between the Count and her, N** pointed to the picture, and asked her who that Saint was?—She is not a Saint,” replied Clara, “but a mortal—a mortal weak and frail as myself.”—“If you know her story, Clara, I wish you would relate it to us;—by doing so you will oblige my friend and me.” “I will do so with pleasure; but it is long, and I fear will tire your patience. However if you are disposed to listen to me, I will satisfy your curiosity.” They seated themselves near the grate, and Clara related as follows.

CHAP. VIII.

“**T**HAT beautiful woman was daughter to Baron Kirchberg, who lived some centuries ago, in the unfortunate times of the feuds that subsisted amongst the Nobles of Switzerland. Idela was one of the loveliest females of that age, and her beauty and modesty made her loved by all who knew her. She lived in the greatest retirement in her father's castle; the care of the family, and her distaff were her occupations, and her harp and deeds of charity her only pleasures;—she never went with the other Barons' daughters to Bern or Zunick, to be present at the tournaments given by the Knights, nor did she

she ever dance at the entertainments her father gave. At such times she always retired into her own chamber with her maidens, for her modesty was shocked at the rude manners and licentious discourse usual on such occasions. She was only known by the poor and unfortunate that needed her assistance; and all the Knights and Nobles knew of her beauty and goodness, was by report.

“ Henry, Count of Toggenburg, the friend and associate of Idela’s father, had often been at Kirchberg’s without seeing Idela—the charming Idela, of whom all the servants spoke with reverence, love, and admiration; and curiosity, for that was his motive, made him wish to see this paragon of beauty and goodness. To accomplish that end, he disguised himself in a pilgrim’s habit; a long beard and artificial paleness concealed his natural ruddy complexion, and in this disguise, with a harp in his hand, he went to his friend Kirchberg’s castle:—he seated himself in the pilgrim’s resting-place near the gate, and played upon his harp, and sung to it. His voice and masterly manner of playing were

soon noticed by the servants, who flocked about him, but he did not see Idela;—he then related a fictitious story of the misfortunes that had befallen him, to his astonished hearers, which was so piteous that some of them could not restrain their tears. They brought him food and other refreshments, and when Idela heard that an unfortunate stranger was at the gate, she went down herself;—but it was not his voice or his harp, but his misfortunes, that induced her to do so. She enquired with sympathizing softness the cause of his woe, and how she could relieve it?—The Count was silent; for the sight of so much beauty deprived him of the power of utterance. He accepted the gift she offered him, stammered his thanks, and left her with a wounded heart.

“He returned to Kirchberg a few days after; and, as soon as he found a suitable opportunity, he informed the Baron of his love, the art he had made use of to gain a sight of his daughter, and asked his permission to pay his addresses to her.—The old Baron laughed, and taking hold of his hand, led him to his
daughter's

daughter's chamber: 'There, Idela,' said he, 'is the old pilgrim, whose misfortunes you related to me with tears!—He is Count Toggenburg, my friend; and I hope he will be as able to move your heart in his real, as in his fictitious character.'

"Toggenburg was more confused than he was the first time he saw her; he gazed upon the blushing maid without being able to articulate a word, but at last recovering himself, he entreated her forgiveness for the liberty he had taken, and begged her permission to visit her again.—His request was granted, and they soon saw each other every day; for their acquaintance soon changed into friendship, mutual confidence succeeded, and that in a short time turned into love.—Henry begged of her to allow him to speak to her father:—Idela's answer was such as became a modest virgin of those times; but although her lips did not grant the permission he asked, her trembling hand and glowing cheeks plainly shewed that the handsome Henry was not indifferent to her. But it was a year before she consented to become his

G 3

wife.

wife. Her father at last joined their hands, called Henry son, and fixed the day for their nuptials. Whilst the preparations were making, Toggenburg introduced his lovely bride to his relations; and Idela was obliged, for the first time in her life, to make her appearance in large companies of Nobles of both sexes. It will easily be supposed that the young Knights were attracted by her beauty, and fluttered about her; but their attentions neither afforded her the least pleasure, nor excited a spark of vanity in her mind; for Henry entirely possessed her heart—and yet Henry was jealous.”

“ Jealous !” exclaimed Harton, “ how was it possible to be jealous without a cause ?”

“ The manners of that age,” continued Clara, “ were rude and unrestrained, and he judged of Idela by the other females of his acquaintance; but suffice it to say, he was jealous; and every smile a compliment extorted, or answer that civility obliged her to make, when a Knight addressed himself to her, was sure to offend him; and his wrinkled brow and unjust reproaches often wounded her

her mind. To remove his fears, she determined to return to her father's solitary mansion sooner than she intended. Henry was obliged to join with his relations in desiring her to prolong her stay ; but he secretly rejoiced at her refusal, and hastened her departure as much as he could without appearing to do so.

“ Idela's father was at that time engaged in a bloody feud with Count Kiburg, and the enmity that subsisted between those two Nobles was hereditary, and had descended from father to son for several generations. Kiburg and Toggenburg were likewise avowed enemies ; and a dispute that had lately happened, had renewed the old hatred, which had lain dormant for some years, and the three families had sworn death and destruction to each other. On the day appointed to decide the contest, by force of arms, the contending parties met with their allies, vassals, and domestics. Much blood was shed on both sides, but fortune, which had wavered for some time, at last determined in Kirchberg's favour :— Kiberg was obliged to cede the field to his

G 4 antagonists;

antagonists ; and, in the confusion of a precipitate retreat, his only son, who had fought by his side during the battle, was separated from the main body ; which as soon as Kirchberg and Toggenburg perceived, they galloped towards him, and at the same moment called to him to surrender himself their prisoner ; but the gallant youth refused to do so, and drew his sword to defend himself ; the others did the same, and after a long and fierce encounter, Kirchberg's sword penetrated Kiburg's heart, and he fell dead from his horse.

“ It is impossible for words to describe the rage and sorrow that filled his father's heart when the account was brought him that his son, his only son, the hope of his age, the supporter of his family, and the pride of the Kiberg's, was fallen by the sword of his bitterest enemy !—But he did not shed a tear, or waste his time in vain lamentations ; for starting from his seat, he ordered his arms and armour to be brought him, and grasping his sword with both his hands, swore the most dreadful oath never to rest till he had washed
his

his hands in the blood of his enemies. Rage stifled his sorrow, and the hope of revenge prevented his feeling the full extent of his loss; for he had neither time for tears, nor to bemoan his son's death, whilst his murderers lived and triumphed in the victory they had gained. The preparations he made to ensure his success in the next encounter were dreadful; and, instead of sorrow, his time was spent in cool deliberation how he might vanquish his hated enemies. He smiled when he was told of their rejoicings at their late success, and redoubled his care; and it seemed as if his son's youthful vigour and the precaution of age were united in him.

“ Kirchberg and Toggenburg smiled when they heard of the old man's dreadful preparations, his oath, and his rage. But Idela was far from joining in their mirth, for she trembled when she thought of the revenge that actuated that enraged father's heart:—her tears flowed incessantly, and frightful dreams, and dreadful presentiments of approaching evil haunted her fancy sleeping and waking;—she never looked at her father
or

or lover without shedding tears, nor thought of their adversary without shuddering, and clasping her arms about Henry, as if she wished to shield him from his rage. As the day of their departure approached, her distress increased; and when it actually arrived, it almost bordered on despair. She pressed the two objects, that were equally dear to her, alternately to her heart; and it was with difficulty that they tore themselves from her embraces. After they had left the castle, she knelt upon the terrace, and followed them with her eyes till they were out of sight.—Toggenburg heard Idela's lamentations; he frequently looked back and waved his sword at her, but he was far from being affected at her sorrow; to him it seemed the voice of triumph, for it was the voice of love.

“ They marched against the enemy :—the two armies soon met; the attack was furious, but the defence still more so. Kiburg seemed like the avenging angel, for wherever his sword fell, death and destruction followed.— ‘ Kirchberg ! Toggenburg ! ’ said he, in a hollow dreadful voice, ‘ ye murderers of my son—

son—where can I find you, that I may revenge his death?’—He at last discovered Toggenburg, and rushing towards him, exclaimed, ‘Ah! have I found you at last?—Either you or I must fall.’—He lifted up his arm as he spoke, and brandished his sword that glittered in the sun.

“Toggenburg, who had ever till now been a stranger to fear, trembled, for the bleeding shadow of the son seemed to hover about the father to shield him; and the only use he made of his sword was to parry his enemy’s blows, and defend himself. But the old man’s arm was irresistible; and Toggenburg, in spite of his endeavours to ward off the strokes, received a violent blow upon his head, which stunned without wounding him. ‘Revenge! revenge!’ said he, repeating his blows till Toggenburg fell senseless from his horse: ‘Carry him to my castle,’ said he; ‘but take care not to let him escape, or be wrested from you; your lives are forfeited if you do.—And now, Almighty Lord,’ continued he, clasping his hands, and looking up to heaven, ‘grant that the other murderer
may

may likewise fall by my hand!—my revenge will then be complete.’ He then spurred his horse, and galloped away in search of Idela’s father.

“ But as soon as Toggenburg fell, the troops, under his command, were routed and put to flight; for Kirchberg who was slightly wounded at the beginning of the battle, had left the field, and was in a place of safety. But the account of Henry’s misfortune soon reached him. ‘ Taken prisoner do you say?’ exclaimed he, putting on his helmet; ‘ bring my horse.’ He mounted it, and endeavoured to penetrate forward, but the retreating army that was pursued by the enemy, made it impossible for him to do so; and he, as well as the rest, was obliged to seek for safety in flight: they at last with great difficulty gained an eminence, where the enemy ceased to pursue them.

“ As it was impossible for Kirchberg to hazard another battle with his weakened army at that time, he returned to his Castle; but before he arrived there, he gave particular orders to all his domestics, on pain of death,

death, not to mention a word to any person in the castle, of Toggenburg's misfortune. The wished-for news of their return soon reached Idela, and she left her solitary chamber, and hastened into the valley to meet and welcome all her soul held dear. She soon perceived her father ; but her eyes wandered in vain in search of her beloved Henry. A false account of his being detained by business tranquillized her a little ; but she pined at his absence, and counted the tedious hours till the time of his expected return arrived. But the illusion soon ceased ; for a few days after, as she was sitting in the hall with her father, who was repeating the assurance he had so often given her, that Henry was neither dead nor wounded, a messenger in Kiburg's colours entered, and said in a loud and audible voice, ' Count Kiburg sends to inform you, Baron Kirchberg, that he has fixed on this day se'nnight for the execution of Henry, Count Toggenburg, who is to be beheaded, by the common executioner, upon his son's, the young Count Kiburg's grave, whom you and he murdered!' The Baron thrilled with
horror,

horror, did not answer a word, but caught hold of his daughter, who with a loud scream fell senseless from her chair; he held her in his arms, and was wholly occupied in endeavouring to recover her. The messenger, after waiting a considerable time, asked him what answer he was to take to his master? Kirchberg's pride was humbled—'Tell him,' replied he, 'what you have seen, and that an unfortunate father begs for mercy.' The man was moved, and left the room in tears.

"Idela recovered, but her sorrow exceeded description; for Henry kneeling upon Kirchberg's grave, and the executioner with uplifted arm, were ever present to her imagination. Swoon succeeded swoon, and her heart refused to listen to the soothing voice of comfort:—'This day week! Oh! this day week!' said she, wringing her hands, in the agony of despair. Her unhappy father hid himself in a remote part of the Castle, for he fancied his daughter was dead; but he would not suffer any person to approach him, that he might not hear a confirmation of what he feared. Three days passed in this dreadful manner,

manner; on the morning of the fourth, the household chaplain said to Idela—"Why do you shed tears in vain, my dearest daughter?—we cannot save him, but let us do what we can, let us pray for him." "Let us do what we can," were the only words that Idela heard. She fixed her eyes on the Monk: 'Do what I can!' said she in a low and hollow voice—"yes, I will do what I can for him." She then walked up and down the room several times, with hasty strides, laying her hand upon her forehead; then sat down and considered for some time, then arose and walked again, and frequently repeated the words—"do what I can!"

"The next morning she spoke but little; but the working of her mind was visible, for sometimes her eyes rolled wildly, and at other times she smiled, as if a ray of comfort cheered her mind. About noon she put on her veil, and wrapping herself in a large cloak, she left the house. Every person supposed she was gone into the garden as she was accustomed to do.

"But

“ But instead of doing so, she hastened to Kiburg, with the fixed determination either to save her lover, or die with him. She arrived there late in the evening; a peasant who happened to be going the same way, informed her of Henry’s approaching death, and that he was confined in the subterraneous prison of a fortified tower at a little distance from the Castle. She listened to him with as much composure as she could assume, and desired him to shew her the place where he was confined. He led her along a narrow stony path, till she was within sight of it, and she then rewarded him for his trouble, and dismissed him. As soon as he had left her, she hastened towards the tower; she found the persons that guarded it sitting round a fire they had kindled upon the ground, near the entrance of it. She summoned all her fortitude to her assistance, and approached them without shewing any signs of the violent emotions she felt. Her unexpected appearance, made the men start; they, however, arose, and bowed to her. She threw back her veil, and the sight of such uncommon

mon beauty, did not a little increase their surprise. ‘ You are humane people, I see,’ said she, addressing herself to them, with such an irresistible softness of voice and manner, that it must have moved even a savage heart in her favour. ‘ Thank God you are so, for I am an unfortunate maiden that is in need of your assistance, and my misfortunes are so great, that I even envy your prisoner the death that awaits him.’ The men stared at her, as if she was a supernatural being, and at last one of them said, after a long pause, ‘ What is it that you desire of us, noble virgin?’—‘ Your prisoner,’ continued she in the same heart-rending tone, ‘ is Count Toggenburg, a noble guiltless youth;—I do not ask you to save his life, for that would be desiring you to break the oath you have taken; all I ask of you is, to do what you dare, without injuring yourselves, or deceiving your master.’—‘ Tell us what you require?’ said all of them at the same time, ‘ and you may depend on our doing it, if it is in our power.’ ‘ It is,’ replied she; ‘ and I am certain when you know the particulars, you will not refuse

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to

to grant my petition. The Count is my affianced husband, alas! you do not know how sincerely we love each other!—once, it was at a time when I little thought that any thing would happen to interrupt our happiness, we talked of the instability of human bliss: the Count pressed me to his bosom, and said, ‘let fate do its worst, it cannot weaken our affection, for our love will remain unalterable till death;’—you see, my friends, he seemed to have a presentiment of his untimely end, and we promised each other, that, if we were separated, and either of us found death approaching, we would, if it was possible, inform each other of it, and see each other again before we died. We bound ourselves by a solemn oath to do so, and it will be impossible for me to die easy, if I do not see him again. The favour I have to ask of you is to admit me into his prison, and to let me remain an hour with him;—you can—you dare do so!—Do not refuse my request; your doing so will break my heart, and I shall accuse you at the day of judgment!’

“ The

“ The humane guards were moved by her pathetic address, and were too conscientious to refuse it. They at first made some objections, but Idela’s eloquence conquered every scruple. The prison gate was unlocked, one of them carried a lamp, and the other took hold of Idela’s hand, and led her down a steep and narrow flight of stairs. At the bottom there was an iron gate through which they passed, and they then went along a dark passage, till they came to a little door ; the foremost of the guards opened it, and said, ‘ May the blessing of the Almighty attend you, pious maiden ! ’ Idela hastily let go her leader’s hand, and entered the dark abode of misery.

“ The lamp that hung against the wall did not afford sufficient light for Henry to know, when the door first opened, who the person was that entered his dungeon ; but the sound of her voice, and her clasping her arms around him, soon convinced him of the reality of his bliss. The past, and the dreadful future were entirely forgotten, and the happiness of the present moment was all—all that occurred to him. Idela remained long

in Henry's arms, and his prison seemed to her as lovely as the garden of Eden did to our first parents; but when their transports were a little abated, the Count enquired by what means she had been able to gain admittance. She related to him the fraud she had made use of to deceive the guards: 'To see me once more before I die!' said he sighing, 'but why do you call it a fraud, my dearest Idela? For it is, alas! but too true, and I had given over all hopes of ever again beholding you, and calling you mine; and preverſe as my heart is, I almoſt wiſh it had not happened, for is it poſſible to ſee Idela without deſiring to live? I muſt now combat with the fear of death, that I fancied I had conquered, anew.—Cruel!—cruel Idela!'

'I am not only come to ſee, but to ſave you, Toggenburg.'

'To ſave me!—To ſave me!—But do not, Idela, endeavour to lull a dying perſon into ſecurity with hopes that cannot be realized!'

'No,

‘ No, Henry, for I am really come to save you,—to save you even against your own inclination, if you make my doing so necessary ! my life is your’s, and the only value I set on it is, that it enables me to prolong your’s. Therefore neither your entreaties, nor those of the whole world, will be able to make me change my purpose. I am calm ; my mind is easy, for my fate is fixed, and nothing—nothing will be able to alter my fixed, my determined resolution.’

‘ You speak, Idela, as if you was a sovereign monarch, but you will find your power insufficient^v to open these gates.—How can you save me, Idela ? For to me there does not appear a possibility of your doing so.’

‘ I will either save, or die with you, Henry ; and the choice is your’s. Therefore listen to me attentively, but I charge you not to interrupt me till I have finished. When the account of your misfortune first reached me, I sunk into a lethargic kind of despair, that did not admit of comfort. I was as weak as an infant, for my strength of mind, and power of recollection seemed to have entirely

forfaken me—nothing but love remained. Sorrow almost broke my heart, but the thought of faving you never once entered my mind ; but yesterday our chaplain, who had before tried every means in his power to alleviate my sorrow without fucceeding, faid, ‘ To what purpofe are our vain lamentations ? let us do what we can for him,—let us pray ! It feemed as if an angel had fpoken the words,—*Let us do what we can for him.* I went into my chamber, and prayed to the Almighty to fave you ; but during my prayer I felt that was not doing all I could, and that, as well as pray, I muft exert the power I had, if I wifhed to fave you. I thought, I reflected the whole night, and at laft formed a plan that I am determined to execute. As foon as I had done fo, my mind was eafy, and the load of woe that had before oppreffed it, was entirely removed, which is a proof to me that the Almighty approves of my defign, and will blefs the performance of it. A countryman, who walked part of the way with me, related your ftory, lamented your fate, and pointed out to me the place of your confinement ;

confinement; my next care was to prevail on the guards to admit me; it was some time before I could determine what to say, that was most likely to move their hearts. I have already told you what I said, but the composure with which I spoke surprises me. They admitted me, and their doing so, was certainly owing to a higher power, that inclined their hearts to mercy. The most difficult part of your rescue is now effected, for I am with you;—do not interrupt me, my dear Henry—hear me first, and I will answer your objections afterwards. You must dress yourself in my garments, put on my cloak, and conceal your face with this veil: I must put on your armour, and when I have covered my face with the helmet, I will call to the guards, and you must go, and leave me here. In that manner your life will be saved. Hush! for I will not be interrupted!—but pray listen to me attentively, for what I am going to say is of the greatest consequence. You must hasten to Kirchberg, and collect as many armed men as you can, privately; return here with them to-morrow night, secure the few

guards that watch the tower, force the gates of it, and the rescue of your Idela is effected. We will then go, each the preserver of the other's life, from the chilly arms of death to the altar, and there repeat the vows of eternal constancy that we have so often sworn to each other. This is my plan, my dear Henry, and I hope it meets with your approbation; but whether it does or not, it cannot be altered, for my resolution is unchangeably fixed.'

"The astonished Toggenburg knelt at his generous benefactress's feet, and kissed the hem of her garment with veneration; but, 'Idela! my Idela!' was all his faltering lips could utter. 'You consent then?' said Idela with a smile, at the same time raising him up, and embracing him. 'I can never whilst life remains,' replied he, 'forget my Idela's generous love and noble conduct.—But to leave you here is impossible—it is what I neither can, nor will consent to do,—therefore leave me, Idela;—go and do all in your power to rescue me; you will succeed better than I, for who can withstand your
persuasive

persuasive eloquence? Your father will direct the undertaking, and head the troops, whilst I count the tardy minutes till my prison gates are burst, and I am restored to my Idela's arms. Therefore go; leave me now, and hasten to save a life that is your's."

"My father is wounded, and his mind is weakened by sorrow; it is therefore impossible for him to assist you. Heaven has ordained me to save you, and I hope you will not offer to oppose the will of Heaven. For who can assemble the troops, but you? Who can lead them on, but you? Who subdue the guards, but you?—Do you think the men will follow me?—besides if I return home, my father will confine me; for I am certain he will not suffer me to engage in an enterprise that he will suppose dangerous. He cannot himself,—others will be employed; the secret will be divulged, and you will be lost;—nothing can save you, but your following my advice; do allow me the exalted pleasure of rescuing you."

"The Count took the lamp from the chain on which it hung, and taking hold of
Idela's

Idela's hand, desired her to stoop, and look at the damp ground, that was covered with toads, vipers, and innumerable reptiles that crawled along it, as well as the walls. ' Shall I leave you here ?' said he, ' here, in this loathsome dungeon of wretchedness and despair ? No ! never, Idela, will I consent to it ; therefore cease to importune me any longer ; but leave me now, and hasten your return. — You tremble—leave me ! I conjure you to leave me !'

' I tremble ?—you are mistaken, Count ; these loathsome vermin cannot alter my firm, my unshaken resolution, for I do not even fear death itself, and those that do not fear death, will not shrink at the sight of a lion's den ;—therefore do not make any more objections, but do as I desire you.'

' Know then, Idela, since you force me to say what I would gladly have concealed from your knowledge, know that to rescue from this place is next to an impossibility ; the road to Kirchberg is guarded ; and those that watch this tower, are more numerous than you imagine, for a great number of
armed

armed men are concealed in the wood. Suppose I should be repulsed before I reach this place, or even supposing I advanced as far, which is extremely improbable, Kiburg is so near, that the sound of the trumpet will give the alarm, and he and his whole force will be here before it is possible for me to effectuate your escape. Think, Idela, was you to expect me to-morrow night, and I should not be able to come—the very thought is sufficient to drive me mad;—it is impossible, Idela!—if you love me, say no more about it, but leave me.’

‘ I reflected on every thing you have said or can say, before I came; and I myself believe, that to rescue from this place by force is almost impossible,—I say almost; but whilst a shadow of hope remains, the attempt is worth making.’

‘ But suppose I should not succeed, and you were to remain in the blood-thirsty Kiburg’s power—Idela, you must die in my stead.’

‘ Does death seem so dreadful to you, Toggenburg?—to you who have so often
braved

braved it in such various shapes? Well then supposing I fall into Kiburg's hands, and he reeks his revenge on me, I shall die for you. I likewise thought on that before I came, and I assure you the fear of death will not frighten me from this place.'

'Or do you suppose Kiburg will spare you because you are a woman? If you think so, you know but little of the deadly hatred an incensed parent's heart is capable of feeling. To him your sex is indifferent, and he will think of nothing but retaliation, and the pleasure of revenging himself on the man who murdered his son;—your death is certain if you remain here;—I therefore beseech you to leave me—upon my knees I beg you to go.'

'Rise, Toggenburg, and cease to wound my heart to no purpose; but rather listen to the dictates of Reason and Nature. You say my death is certain, but I think it much less so than your's, for is there not a possibility that surprise, pity, or perhaps admiration of a conduct that he may call uncommon, may move his heart in my favour, and induce him

to pardon me? I own it is but a possibility, and if I loved life more than I love you, I own I would not make the trial. But let us even suppose the worst: I am led into Ki-burg's presence, and instead of the enemy he expected, he sees his bride, and the man's daughter by whose hand his son fell; suppose him deaf to my prayers, regardless of my sex, and insensible to the shame of murdering a woman, or that the desire of revenge is more powerful than every other feeling, and I must die;—well let it be so;—I shall die content, for I die for you; and death in that manner is less painful than if I fell a victim to despair, or pine away a few sad months before this stubborn heart breaks; for if you think I shall survive you, you know as little of my love, as of my present determination.'

'And shall I submit to be shamefully vanquished in this contest?—Shall I, to preserve my life, sacrifice your's? Idela, you desire an impossibility; I am determined not to do it.'

' I

‘ I do not desire you to live without me ; I only wish to try to save both our lives, which you, with an obstinacy that to me seems unaccountable, are determined I shall not do.— I am convinced my life is of the same value to you, as your’s is to me, for our love is reciprocal ;—but we may both be saved, and live many happy years together. Therefore summon up your courage, Toggenburg ; and do not let us neglect this favourable opportunity—the only hope that remains!—If you do, your motive is pride, which makes you scorn to be under an obligation to a woman, even to me.’

‘ Say what you will, Idela, your words will not be able to charm me from this place, or make me do that which I know is wrong. I am determined to remain here !’

‘ Well then remain !—Remain, and let your senseless pride destroy the fabric of happiness that Love and Hope have raised !—How different was the opinion I entertained of you !—Remain, but know that I am determined to share your prison with you ; and instead of one victim, Kiburg shall have two !’

—Idela

—Idela laid herself upon the ground as she pronounced the last words, and closed her eyes, as if she was going to sleep.

‘ Idela, you surely are not in earnest !—What purpose can your remaining with me answer ?—Reflect that your death is inevitable !—Why, Oh ! why do you distress me in this manner ?’

‘ What can induce you to think I am jesting ?—Be assured that I am in earnest ; and I again repeat, what I have so often said, that I am determined either to save you, or die with you !—Oh ! Henry ! Henry ! I beg, I conjure you to embrace the only means, the only possibility there is left of saving us both !’—She then repeated what she had said before, and urged the Count with prayers, persuasion, and tears, till he at last, after a dreadful conflict, granted her request, and consented to her remaining in the prison in his stead, which she repeatedly assured him was the only means of saving either of their lives.

“ She unbraced his armour, and then hastily undressed herself as much as was necessary ; as soon as the iron breast-plate concealed

cealed her chaste bosom, she dressed her lover in her clothes, and hung her cloak about his shoulders; he then assisted her in putting on his armour, and whilst he was doing so, he renewed his entreaties that she would resign him to his fate. But she was deaf to his remonstrances, and desired him to hasten as much as he could, as the hour that was allowed her was nearly expired, which made her fear they might be surpris'd by the guards before they were ready.

“ As soon as Toggenburg had finished his task, he leant against the wall, and gazed at her for some time in silent anguish; but recollecting himself, he dropped upon his knees, and raising his hands and eyes to heaven, said, ‘ Father of Mercy, thy all-seeing eyes view what passes here!—Guard, Oh! guard my Idela; for if ever a mortal deserved thy peculiar care, she does!—Assist and comfort her, and save the most virtuous, the best of her sex!’

‘ Now you must go, Henry,’ said Idela; ‘ and this,’ embracing him, ‘ is either our last farewell, or the beginning of our happiness.’

He

He pressed her to his bosom in speechless sorrow. She put on the helmet, pulled down the visor, concealed her lover's face with the veil, and then threw a large stone against the prison-door, which was the sign she had agreed to give the guards.

“ They unlocked the doors ;—Toggenburg clasped Idela in his arms, and pressed his lips against the cold and envious iron that concealed her face. She pressed his hand, and said in a low whisper, ‘ Once more farewell !—May every good angel be your guide !’ Toggenburg reeled through the narrow aperture, and along the dark passage, as if he was intoxicated ; the guards walked before him, and one of them said, ‘ I hope God will comfort you, noble virgin ; you have kept your promise ; and your lover can now die easy !’ The outer-gate was open ; he hurried through it, and waving his hand to his conductors, to thank them, passed the other guards who were seated round the fire, most of them asleep, and walked down the flinty path that led to the plain. He did not stop till he came to a cottage that belonged to one

of Kirchberg's vassals, a person in whom he knew he could confide. As soon as he had gained admittance, he informed him who he was, and desired him to procure him a suit of armour;—the man offered him his, which Toggenburg accepted; and, as soon as he had put it on, and recommended secrecy to the man, he proceeded to Kirchberg, where he, in a feigned voice, desired the door-keeper to inform the Baron that a stranger, who could give him some account of Toggenburg, desired to speak to him. It was his intention to discover himself to the Baron; to desire him to assemble the troops to liberate Toggenburg; and to appoint him to command them under a fictitious name; for he was afraid the pleasure they would feel at finding him at liberty, would make them forget the precaution and secrecy that was so necessary to be observed. The servants had some difficulty to prevail on Kirchberg to admit the stranger.

Toggenburg! said he; 'what can he tell me of him but what I already know? But let him come.' The Baron did not know of his daughter's absence; for the servants,

afraid of increasing his sorrow, had not mentioned it to him.

“ He raised himself up a little when the stranger entered, and, in feeble accents, enquired what news he brought?—Toggenburg took off his helmet, and threw himself at the Baron’s feet. Kirchberg started, and without speaking, rose from his couch, and hastened towards the door. Toggenburghastily caught hold of his arm: ‘ For God’s sake,’ said he, ‘ do not mention my name!—You will ruin yourself and me if you do.’ But Kirchberg, without attending to his words, endeavoured to free himself from his hold, that he might inform his daughter of the happy tidings of Toggenburg’s return. The Count, guessing his design, held him faster; which irritating him, he exclaimed in a passion, ‘ Let me go, unfeeling man!—do you want to kill my child? She has suffered enough on your account already. Let me loose!—let me go!’ The servants hearing their master frequently repeat, ‘ let me loose! let me go!’ fancied an assassin was in the room, and hastened to his assistance; but they stood almost petrified

with amazement when they saw the Count, who, as soon as they entered, let go the Baron's arm, and striking his own forehead, exclaimed, 'Unhappy father! and thrice unhappy Toggenburg! what will now become of us both?—All, all is lost!'—'Call my daughter!' said the old man, without attending to his words, and hurrying himself to her chamber as fast as his trembling limbs would permit. 'Tell her that Toggenburg is here. Idela! Idela! Henry is come. Come down I say.—Why don't you fetch her Count?—Why do you stare so? (to the servants). Go and tell her to come down this moment.—Idela! Idela! Toggenburg is here!'—The servants then informed him that they did not know where their young mistress was; and that she had been missing since the morning before, when they saw her go into the garden, as she was accustomed to do; but that they had neither seen nor heard any thing of her since. 'Go in search of her, and do not return till you have found her,' said the Baron, in a commanding voice. The servants, not daring to oppose his orders, went

into the garden and wood, although they knew their labour would be vain; for they had sought for her there that morning, as well as the preceding day. The Baron returned to the room where he had left the Count: 'Idela is lost,' said he; 'nobody knows where she is! What can be become of her? My God, where can she be!—Do you know, Toggenburg?'—'Alas! I do,' replied he, 'and it was my intention to have informed you long ago, if your precipitation had not prevented me.' He then related to him the particulars concerning his daughter, where he had left her, and the plan that was formed to rescue her that night; but he concealed from him the fears that harrowed his own mind, that the secret of his being at liberty having transpired, was very likely to frustrate the whole undertaking. They then consulted together, and formed the plan of operation. Kirchberg, weak as he was, was determined to assist; nor could Toggenburg's persuasions, who perceived how useless his presence would be, prevail on him to remain at home. 'Shall I do less to save my living child,' said

he, foaming with rage, 'than Kiburg did to revenge his dead one?'—The preparations were made; and the impatient father and lover counted the tardy moments till the wished-for night appeared. Nothing could equal their impatience.

“The Count's fears were too well founded; for the news of his being at Kirchberg spread like wild-fire; every one knew he had escaped, although the means by which he had effected it was a secret to every one except the Baron. The report soon reached Kiburg's ears, for one of his vassals informed him of it early in the morning: he was in a furious passion, and ordered the guards to be called to give an account of their prisoner.—They laughed, and said they were certain he was in the tower, unless he had undermined it, and dug his way out; another said he had seen him that morning, when he carried him his food; and they joined in assuring the Count, that, guarded as he was, it was impossible for him to effectuate his escape, and they begged of him to depend on their vigilance and fidelity. Whilst they were speaking, another messenger

messenger entered the room out of breath, 'Count Toggenburg is at Kirchberg,' said he; 'I am sure he is; for I just met Kirchberg's bailiff, and he said with a sneer, 'If you wish to keep a bird when you have caught it, I would advise you to fasten your cage better for the future.' I told him our cage was fast enough, and our bird safe. 'If the bird you mean,' replied he, 'is Count Toggenburg, I can tell you, for your comfort, that he is in the hall with my master; we have all of us seen him.'

'Bring your prisoner,' said Kiburg; 'this hour is his last.—Kirchberg shall see that I am not to be played with, and that the plans he is forming to rescue him are vain. Go, but keep yourselves in readiness to obey my orders as soon as I send for you. Every one of you must suffer the death intended him, if you have let him escape.'

"Idela had passed the night more tranquilly than she herself expected to do. It is true, the noisome vermin made her shudder when she first laid herself down upon the half-rotten straw that covered the damp ground;

but her fortitude was unshaken; and although her fate seemed wrapped in impenetrable darkness, yet a ray of hope frequently cheered her virtuous mind; besides sleep, that for the last three nights had fled from her, now kindly came to her relief, and she soon fell into a refreshing slumber that lasted till morning. She heard the guard who brought her food, unlock the door, and pulled the visor over her face, and lay as if she was asleep. ‘This is the first sleep he has had since he has been here!’ said the man, setting down the bread and water, and locking the door as gently as possible.

“About two hours after, Idela heard several foot steps coming down the stone stairs, and hastening along the passage. ‘Is it possible that Toggenburg can be come already!’ said she to herself; and her heart beat with tumultuous joy when she heard the chain let down, and the door unlocked. She flew towards it; but, alas! instead of her beloved Henry, several guards entered!—‘Count,’ said one of them, ‘recommend your soul to God, for this hour is your last; we have orders

ders to lead you to the place where death awaits you !’—Idela trembled, and a chilly coldness ran through every vein ;—she knelt down, and prayed that the Almighty would support her in the hour of death, have mercy on her soul, and comfort her afflicted father and lover. The guards stood round her with folded hands, as if they joined in the prayer. Idela rose, and followed them along the passage, and up the stairs ; when in the Castle-yard, she stretched out her arms towards Kirchberg, and looked up to heaven, and then followed her leaders up the steep hill to the Castle, which stood upon the eminence of it. Two large folding-doors opened to admit her, and she was led into a spacious hall, hung round with arms and armour ; but the first object that caught her eye was a hillock of sand, that was piled up in the middle of it. The sight of it almost made her faint ; and she trembled so excessively, that she was obliged to lean on one of the guards to keep herself from falling.

“ At the farther end of the hall sat Count Kiburg, his wife, and two daughters, in deep mourning.

mourning. The sight of her son's supposed murderer made the Countess scream, and the young ladies turned pale, and trembled at the prisoner's approaching fate. Kiburg rose from his seat, and placing himself opposite to Idela, said, in a stern and tremendous voice, 'Toggenburg, thou base assassin of my only son, behold the misery thou hast occasioned! behold the tears of an unhappy father, mother, and sisters, whom thou hast robbed of their only comfort and support!—My name, my family must now sink into oblivion; and when I am no more, my wife and daughters will be left without any one to protect or defend them. And it is all owing to thee, thou murderer and dastardly villain!—May my son's blood fall upon thy head, and upon those of thy vile associates, Kirchberg and his daughter! and, as it would be a pity to keep friends long separated from each other, thou mayst comfort thyself with the assurance that the same grave will soon contain you all; for the measures I have taken to get them into my power cannot fail. And now, executioner, perform your office.'

“ The

“ The guards laid hold of Idela, who, at the beginning of the Count’s address, had sunk into the arms of one of them, and had heard very little of it : one of them unbuckled her breast-plate, whilst another took off her helmet ; but they started back ; and the executioner, whose arm was raised to strike the deadly blow, let the ax drop when they perceived a female bosom, but which was concealed at the moment it was uncovered, by the long flaxen tresses that rolled upon it. A solemn silence reigned, and Kiburg’s eyes were fixed on Idela : ‘ Ah ! what is the meaning of this ? ’ said he, after a long pause ; ‘ where is Toggenburg ? and who is this ? ’—The guards trembled, for they too well guessed the cause of the transformation. The Count’s daughters hastened to Idela’s assistance ; they humanely led her to a seat, and rubbed her temples with strong spirits ; she at last opened her eyes :—‘ Who art thou, girl ? ’ said the impatient Kiburg. Idela attempted to answer him, but could not speak till she had swallowed a few drops of wine that was brought her.—Kiburg perceiving she wore Toggenburg’s
armour,

armour, was in an agony ; for he was afraid he had vanquished a female instead of his enemy. He ordered the guards and executioner to leave the room, and then again approaching her, he asked her, in a less furious manner than before, who she was ? She raised her eyes towards him with a look that implored mercy, and then throwing herself at his feet, replied, in a low and feeble voice, ‘ I am Idela, Kirchberg’s unfortunate daughter, and Toggenburg’s bride !’—‘ Kirchberg’s daughter !’ exclaimed the Count, with almost frantic joy. ‘ I thank thee, Heaven ; thou hast fulfilled my wish ; my happiness is complete, for I can now take a glorious revenge.’—Idela stretched out her arms towards Kiburg, but he either did not, or would not see her ; whilst his wife and daughters, almost drowned in tears, wished, but dared not intercede in her favour. He frowned at them, and said, ‘ I command you not to look so pitifully at that girl ; for her father’s blood flows in her veins, and the same hatred fills her heart. A blind and savage fury induced her to direct a sword, that her weak hand was incapable of guiding,
against

against me; that she might boastingly say to her worthless parent, We killed father and son! Why didst thou go with thy father to the battle, thou blood-thirsty miserable wretch?’

‘ I did not go with my father; and if it had been in my power to have saved your son’s life, you would now, Count Kiburg, be the happiest of parents. Nor did I ever draw a sword against you.’

‘ Infamous girl! did not a stroke you received from me stun you? did you not fall from your horse? did not I take you prisoner, and send you here?’

‘ It was not you that made me prisoner, for I voluntarily delivered myself into your power. It was Toggenburg you vanquished; and as I am here in his stead, the whole of your vengeance must fall on me.’

‘ You say it was Toggenburg that I took prisoner; I know it was. But how came you here? and where is that murderer?’

‘ You loved your son, Count Kiburg; would you not willingly have died in his stead? I die for Toggenburg, whom I love as well as you loved your son; and all I desire is, that
you

you will pity me as I do you; for it is dreadful indeed to lose those we love.—But my father and Toggenburg, they likewise deserve your pity!—Do not, Oh! do not refuse them some share of it; for they are indeed more miserable than you are!’

‘What means did you use to release my prisoner, and take his place?’

‘Love enabled me to effect the difficult undertaking. Your guards could not resist my tears, my prayers, and entreaties to see him once again before he died; humanity at last prompted them to grant my wish. I saw him; but the difficulty I found to prevail on him to save himself, was much greater than to gain admittance. He dressed himself in my clothes, put on my veil, and——’

‘Went!—The mean, the selfish villain; who, not content with the murder of my son, adds that of his own bride to the number of his crimes!’

‘You injure him with your suspicions, Count; for Toggenburg is neither mean nor selfish! If he had persevered in his refusal, and Heaven knows the various arts I was obliged

obliged to use to prevail on him to go ! you would have had two victims instead of one ; for I was determined either to die for him, or with him. He left me at last, with the assurance that he would either rescue me from your power, or die in the attempt.'

' Let him save you if he can.'

' Fate has denied him that happiness, and is determined you shall be revenged. I am the victim, and rejoice at being so !—But there is one comfort that remains for him, that it is not in your power to deprive him of—it is, that my heart never ceased to love till it ceased to beat, and that the thought of dying for him robbed death of its terrors.—He will not escape your vengeance, enraged father ; for, believe me, Toggenburg will not long survive his Idela. But I conjure you, Count, to spare my father ;—let my blood appease your wrath—suffer him to die in peace ; your sword need not pierce his heart, for it will soon be broken by grief and despair. In the meanwhile, as soon as your son's spirit and mine meet in the mansions of eternal bliss, there, where enmity and revenge are unknown,

unknown, we will wait the coming of our parents, and anticipate the happy moment when the strife and hatred, that rendered them childless and unhappy here, shall end !—I own the thought of death, and the preparations that are made for it are dreadful ; but I neither complain of injustice, nor ask you to spare my life.’

“ The Count’s heart was moved, and, to conceal his emotion, he turned from her, and went to the window ; but the sight of his son’s grave, that his eyes unfortunately fixed on, renewed the rage that was beginning to subside in his bosom. ‘ No !’ said he, in a voice that expressed the most violent rage, and stamping his foot upon the ground as he spoke, ‘ I cannot forgive—it is impossible—she must die !’ And turning to Idela, who was still upon her knees, he hastily caught hold of her arm, and dragged her towards the window : ‘ Look,’ said he, pointing to the grave, ‘ that’s my son’s, my only son’s grave ; and you are his detested murderer’s child ;—you must die !—I cannot, cannot pardon you !’

“ Idela

“ Idela stretched out her arms towards the grave, and said, in a solemn manner, ‘ Lord, be merciful to me !—And thou beautified spirit, whose dust reposes there, let my blood atone for my father’s crime ; and, as a proof that thou art appeased, meet me at the gates of Heaven, where we, content to have been the victims of our parent’s hatred, will join in praying for the happiness of those so dear to us ; and that the recollection of their having caused our deaths may never oppress their minds, or cause a tear to flow !—Count Kiburg, I am ready ; but, before I die, I beg you will assure me of your forgiveness, as I do you of mine ; and, as I shall soon be united to your son, give me your blessing, and call me daughter.’ She again knelt to him, and alternately pressed his trembling hand to her heart and lips.

“ The scene was awful beyond description : the Countess was so much affected that she gave a loud scream, and her daughters, almost suffocated with tears, hastened to Idela, knelt on each side of her, and supported her in their arms ; whilst their mother, who stood behind

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her, threw her arms round her neck, kissed her forehead, and wetted her face with her tears. ‘Bless, Oh! bless me, father!’ continued Idela, ‘your wife and daughters have done so already—add your blessing to their’s—I shall then die content; and I hope Heaven will grant my wish, and bestow innumerable blessings on you and your family!’

“The old Count looked at her without speaking; for sensations of humanity and tenderness, till now unknown to him, worked so powerfully in his mind, that they prevented his utterance, and forced tears into his eyes, which were to him a strange phenomenon, and an invisible power urged him to forgive and fold the kneeling maid to his heart. Idela rose from her knees, and, clasping her arms about his neck, pressed her lips against his furrowed cheek: ‘My father!—my reconciled father!’ said she, ‘can you—will you pardon me?’ The Countess caught hold of her husband’s hand, his daughters embraced his knees, and the Count, unable any longer to resist his own feelings, and their united entreaties, said, ‘God bless you!’ and with these words the hatred
he

he had borne her, evaporated from his mind. 'My daughter! my dear daughter!' and 'our sister!' was repeated by the Countess and her children in the same breath. The latter ran, and fetched some of their clothes, and, a few minutes after, Idela was dressed in female apparel.—The Count looked at her, frowned, and was going to speak; but the supplicating looks that surrounded him, and the upbraidings of his own conscience, made him turn aside, as if he felt ashamed of the severe expressions that were going to escape his lips. He looked at the grave; but his son's spirit seemed leagued with Idela; for, instead of revenge, the sight of it inspired him with affection for her.

"The repose that Idela had enjoyed the preceding night, had calmed her mind, and fanned the spark of hope it entertained before, into a flame: she had studied the whole morning, in case her delivery should not be effected, or if she was summoned into Kiburg's presence before it was, what she should say that was most likely to move his heart in her favour. It is true, the unex-

pected sight of the executioner with the ax in his hand, and the sand that was heaped up to receive her blood, terrified her so much when she first entered the hall, that she nearly fainted; but when she recovered, and found herself in the Countess's and her daughter's arms, her fortitude returned, and enabled her to go through the trying scene that awaited her with a courage and resignation that seemed almost supernatural. The unhappy father's rage was inflamed almost to madness when he thought of his son; but Idela turned that reflection to her own advantage, and made such a proper use of it, that the very idea, which at first stimulated revenge, at last disarmed his anger.'

" Idela's death was no longer thought of, and Kiburg's looks seemed to express regret that he had ever entertained an intention of that nature. She was led from the place of execution into the banqueting room, and treated with particular marks of respect, which she received with humility and gratitude. A few hours after, Kiburg went into the garden, and found Idela kneeling upon
his

his son's grave ; he caught her in his arms, embraced her, and repeatedly called her his dear daughter. Idela lifted up her clasped hands in a supplicating manner, and said, ' My dear and venerable parent, if you love your Idela, make her quite happy ;—forgive my father !—forgive Toggenburg !' He did not reply, but turned from her without shewing any sign of passion. She threw herself upon the grave, Happy ! happy spirit !' said she, with an expression of sorrow that penetrated the old man's heart ; ' intercede for me !—I know thou hast forgiven them !—incline thy father's heart to do the same !' Kiburg turned round as she pronounced these last words, and raising her from the grave, said, ' Idela, you have taught me a new lesson ; for I find forgiveness sweeter than revenge ?—my sword shall never more be drawn against them !—I resign the avengement of my son's death to Heaven !—But do not ask for more ; for more I cannot grant !' He then left her, and returned to the castle."

“ When the family was retired to rest, Idela found means to leave it unobserved, and hurried to the tower, which was no longer guarded, to wait there for her lover’s arrival. About midnight she heard a rustling amongst the bushes; it was Toggenburg, who advanced before the rest to observe the number and position of the guards; for the account of Idela’s fate had not reached Kirchberg when he left it. She approached the spot from whence the sound proceeded: Toggenburg saw the well-known form, but could not believe his eyes: ‘ Henry!’ said she. As soon as he heard the sound of her voice, he rushed from his hiding-place into her arms with speechless joy; but immediately recollecting himself, he caught hold of her, and carried her down the narrow flinty path, without listening to what she said, till they came to a place where a great number of armed men were assembled. ‘ Here she is, father!’ said Toggenburg. Kirchberg at first doubted his senses, but the next moment assured him of the reality of his bliss;—and surely three happier mortals never existed.

“ As soon as the first transports of their joy were a little abated, Idela related to them what had befallen her since they parted. Her father and Toggenburg listened without interrupting her, but Henry sometimes caught hold of her arm, as if he was afraid she would be snatched from him; sometimes to conceal his emotion he laid his face upon her shoulder; and sometimes he kissed the hem of her garment. Kirchberg’s eyes were raised to Heaven during the whole relation. When Idela had finished, he pressed her to his bosom, then left her, and walked up and down between the rocks in the most violent agitation. He returned to them in about half-an hour with the traces of tears still visible on his cheeks: ‘ Toggenburg!’ said he in a low and tremulous voice, ‘ Kiburg is a noble-minded man!—he is better than I am,—and I now, alas! too late, perceive that we ought not to obey the dictates of revenge; and that a time may come, when the actions we once boasted of, and gloried in, may cover us with shame, and drive us to despair;—Oh! what would I give at this moment, if Kiburg’s blood had not stained my sword!’

“ As soon as the morning dawned, Toggenburg proposed returning to Kirchberg; ‘ Oh !’ said the old man, pointing to Kiburg, ‘ that’s the first place I intend going to :— return to Kirchberg,’ continued he, turning to the warriors ; ‘ your services shall be rewarded when I come back.’ They obeyed his commands, and he, Toggenburg, and Idela proceeded to the Castle. The guards at the outer gate admitted them, and Idela led her father and lover, along the ramparts, into the garden. She stopped at young Kiburg’s grave :— ‘ Stay here till I return,’ said she ; ‘ I shall come back in a minute.’ She then left them, and went into the house, and was fortunate enough to meet Kiburg at the gate, and to entice him into the garden ; when there, she chose a bye-path that led to the spot where his son was buried, and the unsuspecting Kiburg followed her to the place where his two bitterest enemies stood.—The unexpected sight made him tremble ; Kirchberg took off his helmet, laid it upon the grave, and bending his knee, said, ‘ Kiburg, I slew your son !—justice demands revenge ! —here

—here is my head!—you are an upright, noble-minded man, and I own with shame that had I been in your place, I should not have acted as you did.’ Idela and Toggenburg knelt at each side of him, and Kiburg after a moment’s pause, stretched out his hand to Idela, and said, ‘I will keep the promise I made you; and do you tell those who slew my son, that I will not revenge his death;—If the Almighty thinks fit, he will do so in my stead.’ He was going to leave them, but Kirchberg caught hold of his arm.—‘I swear by God, and the Blessed Virgin,’ said he, ‘that I will not leave your son’s grave; and that neither the summer’s sun, nor winter’s frost shall drive me from it, till you have forgiven me.’

“Kiburg looked at him; tears flowed down his venerable cheeks, and unable to support himself any longer, he seated himself upon the grave near Kirchberg, and taking his hand, said ‘I forgive you!—but now leave me, or (he pronounced the last words in a low voice,) ‘you will force me to love you.’ Kirchberg stretched out his open arms
towards

towards him; he looked at him some time, as if he was undetermined what he should do, but at last rising, he rushed into them, embraced him, and then hurried into the house, seemingly ashamed of what he had done.

“ A few hours after, a thorough reconciliation took place. ‘ Oh !’ said the two old men, ‘ had we but known how sweet mutual forgiveness is, how many tears, how many sleepless nights should we have spared ourselves.’ They spent a happy day together, and in the evening Kirchberg and his family returned home. The first time Idela was alone with Toggenburg, she gently reproved him for the coldness of his behaviour towards Kiburg, and declared he had not done justice to his exalted generosity. ‘ Was it possible,’ replied he, ‘ to think of any thing but you?—you, who intended to sacrifice yourself to save me!—never, never can I repay your goodness and love! and I am now convinced of the sincerity of your affection, your truth, and constancy.’—‘ You are now convinced! Why did you ever doubt them?’ interrogated Idela with a smile.

‘ Forgive

‘ Forgive me, Idela, for owning that I sometimes did. For how many examples do we daily see of men that are deceived by your sex :—But now if an angel was to descend from Heaven, if a saint was to appear to me, and swear by the Holy Passion that you were false, I should not believe him ; or if I was to see you in the arms of another, I should rather doubt my senses, and believe it to be a diabolical vision, than Idela. Nothing, nothing will ever tempt me to mistrust, or harbour a suspicion injurious to the purity of your mind !’

‘ I hope you never will, for jealousy and distrust are hateful to me, and would make me miserable ! unspeakably miserable !—you surely are incapable of wounding your Idela’s heart, and repaying her love in such a manner ?’

‘ No, Idela ! that is impossible ! I know your heart, for I have seen it without disguise, —you can never deceive me, nor I mistrust you !—my confidence in you is unbounded, and my peace of mind ensured for ever.’

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“ A few days after, a priest joined their hands, and Henry, secure of his Idela's love, thought himself, what he really was, one of the happiest of men. The nuptials were celebrated with a banquet, after which, Idela was conveyed, with princely pomp, to his castle, where magnificent entertainments were prepared, that lasted several days. All the Knights and Barons, that lived in the neighbourhood of Kirchberg, assembled there to conduct her home, as was the custom of those times; and Idela's praise, and the repetition of her noble conduct, in releasing her lover from prison, and venturing her life to save his, was the general topic of conversation. It was the theme of the minstrel's songs, the oath that lovers swore; for when a maiden wished to remove the doubts of the man she loved, she usually said, ‘ I love you, as well as Idela loves Toggenburg.’ The banquetings and tournaments at Toggenburg Castle lasted a whole week, but Idela preferred the solitude she was accustomed to, to the brilliant entertainments that were given on her account. Kiburg's daughters assisted
her

her in doing the honours of the house, and she retired to her lonely chamber as often as she could, without giving offence; for she greatly preferred the society of her own thoughts to the flattery she was obliged to hear when in company, and which she always listened to with coldness and reserve.—Henry thanked God, and every Blessed Saint, for having bestowed such a wife on him.

“ As soon as the festivities were over, Idela lived in the same retired manner as she did before her marriage, and was a pattern to her sex of industry and conjugal affection. When her husband was present, she was mild, complying, and humble, the soother of his cares, his counsellor and friend. When he was absent, the drawbridge was pulled up, the gates barred, the lights and fires extinguished, and her chamber-door locked. The castle seemed deserted, for no person was admitted, and the vagrant pilgrims and beggars, that applied for alms, were served at the postern gate by the purveyor of the household. Idela hardly knew her husband's arm-bearers, although

although they were almost the only persons she saw.

“ Toggenburg left his home as seldom as possible; but when he was obliged to do so, he never quitted his beloved wife without shedding tears, and he always hastened his return as much as possible, for he counted every hour lost that he did not spend with her.

“ About a year after the happy day that he first called Idela his, he was forced to march with his troops to Kiburg to assist the old Count who was engaged in a feud with a neighbouring Baron. It was the first hostile affair he had been engaged in since his marriage; and when Idela, bathed in tears, took leave of him, she conjured him to take as much care of himself as he could consistent with honour, and not to expose himself to unnecessary danger, but to remember that her life depended on his. The Count tenderly pressed her to his bosom, and assured her, that he would do as she desired; that he did not think the present affair would prove of great consequence; and that he hoped,
and

and expected to return to his adored wife in a few days. Idela's courage seemed to have entirely forsaken her, for she was inconsolable, and Henry with difficulty extricated himself from her arms. She accompanied him a little way, and then returned to her solitary mansion.

“ The drawbridge was pulled up, and the castle gates fastened as usual. Idela locked herself in her husband's chamber, where surrounded with his arms and armour, she did not think herself quite separated from him; she kissed the visor of his helmet, and pressed the iron breast-plate to her tender bosom, and wearied Heaven with her prayers for his preservation: she likewise made a vow to the Holy Virgin, to lay aside her gold, jewels, and laces, and clad in the habit of a penitent, to fast and pray till his return.

“ She took the pearls out of her hair, and locked them up with the ornaments that adorned her ears and bosom: she then drew the gold ring from her finger that Henry had given her at the altar, as a pledge of his eternal love. She looked at it, and whilst she

she was reading his name that was engraven in the inside of it, her tears flowed with such violence that they almost suffocated her. She went, still holding the ring in her hand, to the open window, from which she could see the lofty spires of Kiburg, and contemplated the spot that contained all her soul held dear. She laid the ring upon the window frame, and lost in thought, threw herself into the chair that stood nearest her, with her eyes still directed the same way, when suddenly a raven, most probably attracted by the shining bait, flew towards the window, and seizing the ring with its bill, flew away with it.

“ The terrified Idela screamed when she saw the bird, and ran to the window as fast as she could ; but it was too late, for it was out of sight in an instant. The dread of its proving an ill-foreboding omen oppressed her heart ; her limbs trembled, and the colour forsook her cheeks and lips. ‘ Gracious Heaven !’ said she, sinking upon her knees, ‘ spare my husband !—save his life !—and let the impending evil fall on me !’ Her prayer was heard, and granted too soon.—But hush,

presumptuous lips! can we weak mortals pretend to fathom the ways of Heaven?—She sent messengers to Kiburg to learn her husband's fate. They returned with the joyful tidings, that they had spoken to him themselves, that he was well, and that, as the dispute was amicably settled, he would soon return, his presence being no longer necessary at Kiburg.

“ He kept his word, and soon followed the messengers. When he arrived at the foot of the mountain, that led to the castle, he dismounted, and giving his horse to his squire, ordered him and the rest of his attendants to remain in the valley till he sent for them; for it was his intention to return home unperceived, and anticipated the pleasure the unexpected sight of him would give his weeping Idela. To effect his purpose he chose a narrow by-path that was almost overgrown with underwood, that concealed him. When near the top of the hill, he perceived one of his menial servants standing under an oak-tree at a little distance from him, looking very attentively at something he held in his hand.

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He approached him as softly as possible, and looking over his shoulder, saw—(had the earth at that moment swallowed him up alive, his terror could not have been greater)—saw Ide-la's wedding ring, the pledge of constancy and eternal love, in the peasant's hand. A death-like paleness overspread his countenance, his lips turned blue, and his whole frame was convulsed and shook as if in an ague fit; for jealousy of the most malignant kind that moment seized his mind.

Count Harton shuddered.

“ He grasped his dagger, and his hand was raised to plunge it into the offender's bosom; but a thought, inspired by hell, suddenly struck him, and made him alter his purpose. He retreated a few steps, and called the man by his name; he turned round, and seeing the Count, hastily concealed the ring (that the raven had dropped at his feet), in his bosom; for he was unwilling his master should see the treasure that fortune had so unexpectedly bestowed on him. ‘ What was you looking at?’ said the Count. The young man, terrified at his furious manner of speaking, trembled

trembled; and after hesitating a moment, stammered an incoherent answer. Toggenburg, without attending to it, ordered him to follow him, and he walked, or rather ran, to the castle. When he came to the moat, he sounded his horn, and gave the token of his arrival, in so loud and tumultuous a manner, that the servants were afraid some accident had befallen him. They let down the drawbridge, and hastened to meet him. ‘Secure that villain!—throw him into the deepest dungeon!’ said he, as he passed them, and ran up the winding stairs that led to Idela’s chamber. Idela knew the sound of his footsteps:—‘It is he!’ said she, running to meet him with open arms. But the Count pushed away her offered hand, rushed by her without speaking a word, and went into his own room.

“Idela almost petrified with horror at her husband’s coldness, and afflicted at the loss of her ring, the token of misfortune that was now too sadly verified, remained rooted to the spot, where he left her, for some time. But at last recollecting herself, she walked

slowly and with tottering steps down the long passage towards her chamber. But she was overtaken by the bailiff before she reached it, who told her, that the Count had ordered young Ulrich to be laid in fetters, and begged of her to intercede for the unfortunate youth, who had repeatedly declared he was innocent of every wilful crime, and did not even know that he was accused of.

“ Idela’s humane heart was moved ; she turned back, and went to her husband’s chamber ; he darted a furious look at her as she entered, which intimidated her, and she remained at the door with downcast eyes.—Toggenburg, who supposed her agitation proceeded from conscious guilt, looked at her with a fiend-like satisfaction, and said, with a ghastly smile, ‘ What is the matter with you, Idela ? And why do you favour me with a visit ? ’—‘ To intercede for your servant Ulrich,’ replied she, in a low voice, ‘ who unfortunately labours under your displeasure, without knowing how he has incurred it.’—‘ Ulrich ! ’ exclaimed he, starting from his seat, and gnashing his teeth ; ‘ Ah ! wretch ! ’

But

But recollecting himself, he stalked towards her with assumed composure, took hold of her hand, and looking at it, asked her why she did not wear her wedding-ring, and where it was? Idela blushed, for the passion he was in made her wish to conceal the loss of it from him at that time: she told him she had laid it aside with her other ornaments, in consequence of a vow she had made to the Holy Virgin on his account.

‘I hope you have taken care of it? Are you sure it is safe?—For woe be to you if I ever find it in another’s hands.’

“The Count, finding it impossible to conceal his rage any longer, and wishing to do so till he had determined in what manner he should punish the offenders, turned from her as he pronounced the last words, and left the room. Idela followed him to the terrace:

‘Pardon me, my dearest Lord,’ said she, ‘for again interceding in Ulrich’s behalf; he never intentionally offended you.’—‘Woman,’ said he, stamping and seizing her hand with violence, ‘where is the ring I gave you?’

‘I laid it in a window,’ replied the terrified

Idela ; ‘ a raven caught it up with its bill, and flew away with it.’—‘ A raven flew away with it ! did it so, cursed hypocrite ? Then fly after it !—For know, lascivious strumpet, I saw it in the beggar’s hand you gave it to !’ So saying, he, in a paroxysm of rage that resembled madness, caught his injured and innocent wife in his arms, and threw her over the terrace-wall. Idela screamed when she perceived his intention, ‘ Lord, thou knowest my innocence, and have mercy on my soul !’ But he, without attending to her words, hurled her down the horrid precipice.

“ The principal victim of his jealousy was fallen, but the lesser still remained ; and the Count’s passion was inflamed to a still greater degree of violence by the reproaches of his own conscience. He ran down the steps that led to the castle-yard ; his looks were desperate, his eyes rolled wildly, and threatened death and destruction to every one he approached. At his command twelve men brought a wild horse, that had lately been caught in a neighbouring forest, out of the stable where it was with difficulty confined,
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and two of his squires were sent to fetch the unfortunate Ulrich: 'What crime have I committed? and by what means have I incurred my Lord's anger?' said the trembling youth, as soon as he appeared in his presence. 'Darest thou ask me, villain?' replied the Count, striking him violently in the face. Ulrich lifted up his eyes to Heaven, and continued to declare his innocence;—the Count ordered both his hands to be tied to the horse's tail, and then to let it loose. His commands were obeyed; for who dared contradict him?—The savage animal was set at liberty; and, as soon as it found itself unrestrained, rushed wildly down the mountain, and dashed the unhappy Ulrich against the rocks. The cords that bound his hands broke before he was quite dead, and his bleeding and almost lifeless body was found by a Friar, whom Providence sent that way: he humanely raised him up, and poured a few drops of a cordial he carried with him down his throat, which revived him a little, and enabled him to make his confession, and re-

ceive absolution. He died in his arms a few minutes after.

“ To fulfil the desire of the deceased person, the Holy Father went immediately to Toggenburg: He found him restless and uneasy; for Idela’s groans and lamentations vibrated in his ears, and followed him wherever he went.

‘ Count Toggenburg,’ said the Friar, as soon as he entered; ‘ the reason of my coming to you is to perform a promise I have just made your servant Ulrich, whose soul, I hope, is with the Almighty. I heard his confession; and he died in my arms.—You, Count, are his murderer! For he declared with his last breath, that he had never designedly offended you, and was ignorant of the crime he was accused of. I hope God will prove a more merciful judge to you, than you was to him! He desired me to intercede with you, in behalf of a person that was dear to him; and hoped you would not let her feel the effects of the hatred you bore him.’—‘ A person that was dear to him!—Cursed, cursed slave!’ said the Count, interrupting him, and foaming
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ing with rage. ‘ Her name is Gertrude,’ continued the Friar, ‘ your late bailiff’s daughter.’—‘ Gertrude ! Gertrude ! do not proceed !—Gertrude !—if—if I have wronged her !’

“ The Friar looked at the Count, and shook his head. ‘ He likewise sends you this ring,’ said he, ‘ that a raven let drop at his feet this morning, as he was sitting under yonder oak. He gave me the ring to give Gertrude ; but when I read the name that was engraven upon it, he altered his mind, and desired me to deliver it to you. Here it is ; and my business with you is ended. I hope God will be merciful to you, and pardon the heinous crime you have just committed !—I leave you, Count, with this admonition—Repent, do penance, and amend your life !’

“ The Count sat pale, cold, and stiffened with horror ; not a word, nor even sigh, escaped his quivering lips. At last, after a long and dreadful pause, he clasped his hands, and pronounced his injured wife’s name :—
‘ Idela ! Idela !’ said he ; but the sound of his voice added to his terrors ; and it seemed as if he heard his own sentence of death pronounced

nounced. He ran down stairs with as much haste as if pursued by demons, into the hall, where his servants were assembled; but he concealed his face, that his ghastly paleness, rolling eyes, and distorted features might not betray Idela's murder.

“ But the angels of the Lord had borne Idela down the precipice upon their pinions; the bushes caught her, and broke her fall, and she sunk from one to the other till, by almost imperceptible degrees, she dropped upon the moss that covered the earth. The sudden fright nearly made her faint, but she was revived by a refreshing shower of rain that fell at the moment her senses were forsaking her. When she first opened her eyes, she looked about her without knowing where she was; but when recollection returned, she fell upon her knees, and thanked Heaven for her miraculous preservation. She then descended to the bottom of the pit, but the ground was moist, and covered with rushes and spongy excretions of the earth. Finding it impossible to remain there, she climbed up

a gentle declivity there was on one side, till she came to a spot that resembled a cavern, and where she was happy enough to find some bramble-berries and ripe elder. She looked up and saw the shining sun-beams glitter amongst the branches of the trees that stood at the top, but the bottom of the abyss was covered with impenetrable darkness; and she heard the frightful hissing of serpents and venomous adders.

“ Idela trembled when she viewed the dreadful place she was in, but she trembled still more when she thought of her husband’s wrath. She sat down, and leant her head against the shelving mountain for some time, till finding herself a little refreshed, she rose up, and with great difficulty climbed a little higher, till she came to a part of the precipice that was nearly perpendicular and as smooth as a looking-glass, which made it impossible for her, with her utmost efforts, to advance another step. ‘ Oh ! Henry ! Henry !’ said she, stretching her hands towards the castle, ‘ did I deserve this treatment from
you?

you? from you, whose life I would have thought cheaply purchased with mine!’ After several vain attempts she gave over all hopes of ever leaving the pit, and with the hope, the wish to live fled from her. ‘I humbly adore thy wisdom, Almighty Providence!’ said she, ‘and am convinced that it is better to die here, than live with Toggenburg.’ Her composure returned, and with a mind at ease, she walked back to the grot, ate a few elder-berries; and after recommending herself to the Holy Virgin, she seated herself, and leaning her head against the mossy side of the rock, fell into a sweet and refreshing slumber, fearless of serpents, toads, or adders.

“Toggenburg, in the mean while, made preparations to seek the corpse of his murdered wife, that he might bury it with funeral pomp in consecrated ground. The weeping servants bound the scaling-ladders together to let themselves down into the pit. The Count and some of the servants went to another part of the opening; the ladders were fastened with strong cords to large oak-trees, and

and they descended from rock to rock, lower and lower into the precipice. They at last by the light of their torches perceived the bottom of it, and the Count regardless of his servants' entreaties not to hazard his life, let himself down with some ropes they had brought with them. The darkness increased every moment, and the light that reflected from above, as well as that from the torch he held in his hand, added to the horrors of the place; he at last reached the bottom, and shuddered at the thought of finding the object he was in search of. He advanced slowly, and closed his eyes when he first perceived the other side of the precipice where he expected Idela's mangled body lay. But he sought for it in vain, for it was no where to be found. Every step he took increased his fears; and the glimmering light of the torches that shone through the bushes, frequently made him start with horror. 'Forgive me Idela!' said he softly, for he was afraid to speak aloud—'spirit of the best and most injured of women, forgive your inhuman husband!' But the sound of his voice added

to his terrors ; his trembling limbs no longer supported him, and he fell upon the ground. After passing some time in the most agonizing state that human nature ever supported, he rose, and renewed his search, which proved as fruitless as before. ‘ Alas !’ said he, ‘ in all probability her body hangs upon one of the trees where no mortal will ever be able to reach it ;—it will be food for the birds of prey, —and the Almighty who suffered me to be blinded by the instigations of the devil, now refuses me the only comfort in my power to enjoy—that of burying her dear remains, and knowing that my ashes will be united to her’s. He held the torch towards the trees, but Idela’s body was no where to be seen. He then climbed up that part of the rock that was accessible, and searched and researched every spot in vain ; he mounted a little higher, and as he stooped to examine the ground, he fancied he heard a sigh. He stopped,—listened,—grasped the torch with both his trembling hands—drew in his breath—the sigh was repeated, and followed by a gentle moan. His blood chilled in his veins,
his

his eyes were closed—another sigh recalled his senses. He made several vain attempts to turn his face towards the spot from whence the sound proceeded ; he succeeded at last, and holding down the torch, saw—joy almost deprived him of reason—saw his Idela, his adored and innocent Idela, fast asleep in the moss-grown cavern of the rock ! The sudden transition, from excess of pain to excess of pleasure, sealed his lips ; he gazed at her with contrition and rapture, and addressed a silent thanksgiving to Heaven when he perceived she had neither received a wound nor hurt ! After contemplating her for some time, he threw himself upon the ground, kissed the garment that covered her feet, and wetted her feet with his tears.

“ Idela moved in her sleep, and soon after opened her eyes ; she stared as if she had had a frightful dream, but was much more terrified when she saw her husband near her. She looked at him as he lay upon the ground with his right hand stretched out towards her in a supplicating manner, and his looks expressive of repentance and sorrow, whilst
his

his trembling lips, in the most heart-moving accents, faintly pronounced these words :—

‘ My Idela !—my dear, my innocent, and much-injured Idela !’ She turned from him, and covered her face with both her hands.

‘ Idela,’ continued he, ‘ adored Idela ! pardon your afflicted and repentant Henry !’ Idela raised her eyes to heaven, and said in a solemn manner, ‘ Beyond those stars, Count Toggenburg, dwells your judge and mine—I hope he will forgive the injury you did me !’

‘ Forgive me, Idela !’ replied the Count clasping her knees, ‘ forgive the effects of sudden passion, inconsiderate rage, and groundless jealousy.’

‘ Remember, Count, at the time I offered my life to save your’s, you swore that nothing should tempt you to think me false, not even if an angel was my accuser. You have broken your oath, and murdered me, and most likely another guiltless person ; for my being alive is a miracle, that heaven, doubtless to prove my innocence, has worked in my favour. To you I am, and ever shall remain
dead ;

dead; and whether you help me out of this pit, or leave me to perish in it, is the same,—I am no longer your's.'

'Cannot repentance move your heart?' and he kissed the hem of her garment, as he spoke. 'The Almighty forgives the penitent sinner!—Be merciful, Idela, for Heaven is merciful.'

'You desire me to imitate the example of Heaven; all I can do, I will—I forgive you, Count! but to return to the duty of a wife is impossible. Never! never could I enjoy a moment's repose in your house; for what methods could I take, after the failure of those I tried, to secure myself against your senseless pride, and mad passions? for I am persuaded that jealousy is the offspring of pride and hatred, not of love!'

'Hatred! hatred! do not injure my love with such a cruel suspicion.'

'I repeat, hatred or contempt; for love cannot exist without mutual confidence.'

"As soon as the morning dawned, Idela was released from her subterraneous abode; but although the Count, upon his knees, en-

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treated her to pardon and return home with him, she persevered in refusing his latter request. Toggenburg, when he found persuasion failed, declared with his usual impetuosity, that, if she would not do so willingly, he would use force; but the servants, who had before joined their supplications to his, to prevail on her to return home, shrunk back, and unanimously declared, that they would not lay violent hands on the saint whom the Almighty had so miraculously preserved. Idela, after again assuring her husband of her forgiveness, and thanking the attendants for their assistance, left them, and came to this place.

“ The Count, and all the servants, followed her to the gates of the convent; the former renewed his entreaties, and even the Abbess interceded in his favour, but nothing could prevail on her to return. She lived twenty years in this convent, and spent her time in devotion and acts of charity. When the nuns asked her, how it was possible to withstand the Count's contrition and love? she replied, ‘ had he really loved me, the sight of one of my rings in a servant's hand would not have

have been able so entirely to efface from his mind the remembrance of my affection, and the severe trial I willingly subjected myself to on his account, as to suffer him to murder me without having stronger proofs of my guilt.' The endeavours of her father and Count Kiburg, although she tenderly loved them both, proved equally inefficacious, and she lived and died here. Upon her death-bed she confessed that she had never ceased to love her husband, but (although she had attempted to do so,) she could not conquer the aversion she felt of living with him again. She built a chapel, and dedicated an altar to the holy angels that had so miraculously preserved her. Her confessor, a learned monk, wrote down the particulars I have just related, and deposited the manuscript in the convent: he likewise painted that picture.

"This," continued Clara, "is the history of the unfortunate Idela de Toggenburg. I visit her cell every morning and evening, and kneeling where she knelt, pray to the Almighty to inspire me with some part of the fortitude she possessed.—I often contemplate that beautiful countenance, so

expressive of pious resignation to the will of Heaven, and I never look at it without feeling myself strengthened in the resolution I so frequently form, of imitating her example; but how weak am I compared to her!"

Harton listened to Clara's relation with the most profound attention; he frequently sighed, and with difficulty concealed the emotion the concluding part occasioned; for the possibility of his wife's innocence for the first time, since their unhappy difference, forced itself into his mind, "Appearances were against Idela," said he to himself;—"perhaps!—but no, it is impossible!—have not I convincing proofs of her guilt?"

CHAP. IX.

HE took leave of his friend early the next morning, and continued his journey with a heavy heart, and a mind more restless and discontented than usual; for although he was unwilling to own, even to himself, the impression that Idela's story had made on him, yet it was impossible for him to think of any thing else for several days; and the possibility, the dreadful possibility, that occurred to him at the moment he heard it, frequently returned, and tormented his mind. But the stings of conscience by degrees became less poignant, and were at last entirely blunted by the whirl of dissipation he soon after was constantly engaged in.

The Countess, in the mean while, passed her time in retirement and solitude, in the house where she was born; where her parents usually resided in the summer, and where every object she saw reminded her of the happy days of youth, and the fallacy and vanity of human expectations. It is true she was mistress of a large independent fortune, and restored to the brilliant circles that a capricious husband's whims had obliged her to leave: nor did the trifling stain her reputation had received, prevent her meeting with the most cordial reception wherever she went; for the families of the highest rank not only overlooked it, but even strove to exculpate her, by throwing all the blame upon her absent husband. The beau monde is in general very good-natured, for it not only easily excuses trivial indiscretions, but even meanness, vice, and folly, if they are counterbalanced by birth and fortune; and they who are happy enough to possess those superlative advantages, may be certain of meeting with a kind reception every where. Besides the Countess was a handsome and accomplished

complished woman ; she was near, but had not attained, her thirtieth year—that rock said to be so fatal to female beauty ; and although the bloom and vivacity of youth were fled, she retained many of her former charms, and the loss of those that were faded, were supplied by the grace and elegance of her form and manners, and the sensibility and gentleness her features expressed, which were rendered still more interesting by the languor of her eyes, and the soft melancholy that was visible in her countenance ; and had she chose to have exerted her power, she would have rivalled younger beauties, and had a crowd of lovers sighing at her feet. But a thought of that kind never entered her mind. She seldom, even in winter, went to town ; but when her presence made it necessary there, she only staid a few days. She at such times visited her former acquaintance, but was on an intimate footing with none ; and though she did not seem to avoid society or amusements, she never sought them. When in company, she spoke very little, and her dress, although fashionable and elegant, was remarkable for

its plainness. She endeavoured to conceal the talents and learning she was mistress of, as much as she could without affectation; and cheerful conversation, or even witty remarks, hardly ever excited a smile, much less a laugh from her. Her only society in the country was an old disbanded officer, who was an intimate friend of her father's, who had left him a pension for life, and a Baroness de L--, an elderly widow lady, whose indigent circumstances induced the Countess to desire she would live with her as a companion. Every person was surprised that such a young and handsome woman, who had just got rid of a tyrannical and disagreeable husband, could bury herself alive in the manner she did. A number of invitations was sent her, and parties of pleasure projected by the neighbouring gentry to amuse her. She accepted some, but politely declined as many as she could without giving offence. The Countess lived in the reclusive manner just described near a year and a half; about the beginning of the second summer, she informed her acquaintance, that her physician had advised her

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her to drink the waters of Spa, and use the warm baths of Aix-la-Chapelle for the recovery of her health, and that she proposed spending some months at those places. Every one approved of her intention, and hoped the gaiety she would be obliged to engage in there, would remove her lowness of spirits, which seemed to be her only complaint. She set out, accompanied by the Baroness, as soon as the necessary preparations were made, and intended, as she told her acquaintance when she took leave of them, to return in three or four months. At the expiration of that time, the Baroness wrote to one of her friends, that she should not have the pleasure of seeing her so soon as she expected when she left her, for the Countess had been advised by different physicians to try a change of air, and use a great deal of exercise, and knowing, if she returned home, she would resume her usual sedentary manner of living, she had advised her to travel through different parts of Germany, which she, with much persuasion, had at last consented to do, and that it was her intention to make a short stay
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at the different towns they passed through, and spend the winter at Hamburgh. But the following spring every person was surpris'd at the Baroneſs's returning alone, and the answer ſhe gave to every one, who enquir'd the reaſon of it, was as follows: "It was an unaccountable whim of the Counteſs's," ſaid ſhe; "every thing was prepared for our return, when an Engliſh lady, whoſe acquaintance ſhe made at Spa, arriv'd at Hamburgh, and perſuaded her to go with her to England, and paſs a ſummer at Bath, and a winter in London. She did all in her power to prevail on me to accompany her, but my unconquerable averſion to the ſea prevented me." As there was nothing extraordinary or improbable in this account, it did not excite the leaſt wonder. The Counteſs wrote but ſeldom, and her letters were always encl'oſed to the Baroneſs, to whom ſhe deſired the answers might be ſent. But the correſpondence ſoon dropp'd entirely, and the loſs of a perſon who neither propagated ſcandal at their tea-tables, danced at their balls, nor play'd at their aſſemblies, was hardly regarded;

garded; and in a very little time she was neither thought of, nor spoken about.

The Count returned from his travels with the determination to settle in his native country, about the time that the Countess was beginning to sink into oblivion. The accounts he received from home, particularly that of the worthless Murden's death, (an apoplectic fit having ridded the world of that monster) obliged him to return home some months sooner than he intended.

That exercise and change of climate had proved of great service to the Count's health both of body and mind, was too visible to be doubted ; but although he had in a great measure got rid of that depression of spirits, apathy, and discontent, that had formerly rendered life a burden to him, his tour had not afforded him the pleasure, nor had he reaped all the advantages from it he vainly expected ; for peace and content were still strangers to his mind, and happiness had eluded his pursuit. Nor had the enjoyments of sense afforded him the gratifications they formerly did ; for his mind continually sug-

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gested comparisons between the past and the present, in a manner by no means favourable to the latter; for the thought of their being venal pleasures, and that the favours beauty granted, could be purchased by any other as well as himself, made them disgusting as well as insipid. He had studied nature in its greatest simplicity and most exalted majesty upon the mountains of Switzerland, Vesuvius, Cenis, and Ætna, the gulph of Venice, the harbour of Naples, and the Islands in the Mediterranean; but how different were the sensations the sight of those wonders of nature occasioned, to the ecstatic rapture he felt when he first beheld them, and he frequently accused himself of insensibility, for being able to view such sublime beauties with coldness and indifference; and the Count with the instability common to human nature, who, when he was settled, fancied nothing could equal the pleasure of being free and at liberty to act without restraint, was no sooner in possession of what he then thought the greatest blessing, than he sighed for the ease and quiet of a domestic life, and he was

as impatient to return home, as he was before to leave it. But when there, some unexpected discoveries, and business of a disagreeable nature, so much employed his time and thoughts, that it was impossible for him to enjoy the repose he wished; for he found his affairs in a state of chaos and confusion that made him tremble. His tenants were oppressed and poor, and instead of finding large sums of ready money as he expected, he was involved in debt; no regular account kept; and the orders he had given and sent, misconstrued or disregarded. It was impossible to conceal any thing from him; for his eyes were opened, and he seemed like one who had long been blind, and was suddenly restored to sight. Murden was accused as the cause of every thing that had happened amiss; and although the Count at first doubted the possibility of his being so, yet incontestible witnesses, and some written proofs, assured him of the truth of the accusation, and he shuddered as often as the reflection darted across his mind, that he had set a wolf to guard his sheep, and nourished a serpent in his bosom.

Harton

Harton had several times since his return made the most particular enquiries about his late wife ; and the account of her sorrow, her retired manner of living, and declining health, did not seem to be indifferent to him ; but her being absent so long was what he could not account for.—“ Gone to Hamburgh !” would he sometimes mutter between his teeth, “ to Hamburgh—and from thence to England !—astonishing !—to England !—Nelson went to England !—Is it possible that——.” But the reason of his leaving his speech unfinished, as well as what he thought, is not difficult to guess ; but that he was the first, and indeed the only one who entertained a suspicion of that nature, is a proof how incurable deep-rooted jealousy is. His eyes were often fixed with a melancholy kind of pleasure upon the Countess’s picture that hung in his dressing-room, and once he was heard to pronounce these words, which seemed to escape his lips without his intention—“ Perhaps I treated her too harshly !” His friends supposed he would marry again ; but when it was mentioned to him, his usual reply was,
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that he never should, and that it was his intention for the future to live for himself, and his children.

His children indeed seemed to engross the greatest parts of his thoughts; he frequently talked about them, and always mentioned them in terms of the warmest affection. It was his intention to fetch them from Berlin himself, as soon as a new wing, that he was building to Harton-Castle (which was still his favourite residence) was finished; which he expected would be in about seven or eight months. But an unexpected event obliged him to alter his plan.

CHAP. X.

ONE of the conditions that Harton made when he entrusted his children to Madame de Vernon's care, was, that she should write him a circumstantial account of every thing that related to them once a month. She had hitherto conscientiously fulfilled her promise, for her letters were always dated the first of the month, and the contents of them had always proved of a satisfactory and pleasing nature. The children had enjoyed uninterrupted health; had not met with any accident; the goodness of their dispositions was commended; and the progress they made in the learning their tender years allowed, was
always

always mentioned in terms that were calculated to give pleasure to an affectionate parent. She likewise informed him, that after having changed their governess two or three times, she had at last been fortunate enough to find one exactly to her wish; she was a native of Alsace; her name Laborde; a woman of sense and abilities; and at the same time disinterested, affable, and in every respect suited to the task she had undertaken;—and she assured the Count that the great improvements his children had made the last year were entirely owing to her, for she was not only perfect mistress of several languages, but had read a great deal, and had particularly applied herself to the difficult study of education for several years. Madame de Vernon concluded with assuring the Count, that she had no doubt of his being satisfied with the improvements his children had made, and hoped the time was not very distant, when she and they should have the pleasure of seeing him.

These assurances, although he believed the virtues and talents of Madame Laborde

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were a little exaggerated by her partial friend, gave him much pleasure. But the account a following letter contained was as unexpected as painful; it concluded with these words: "The children are all indisposed,—they have complained these two or three days; but I hope it will not be of any consequence. I however sent for Doctor R**, who is the ablest physician we have; he thinks the complaint nothing but colds attended with a slight fever. But should they be worse, or the illness prove a serious one, you may depend on my writing to you again by the next post; and your not receiving a letter from me, will be a sign that their indisposition is removed." It will easily be imagined with how much impatience the Count waited for the return of the post; he sent a servant to the office to wait for its arrival, and was relieved from a load of uneasiness by his returning without a letter; and as none arrived the next week, his fears abated, and thinking the danger happily over, he set out to an estate he had in Silesia, where some business made his presence necessary; but he left orders that if any letters came
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from Berlin, they should be sent after him with the greatest expedition. A few leagues from the place he was going to, he was overtaken by one of his servants, who gave him a letter. The Count broke the seal with a trembling hand, and one may judge, but cannot describe what his feelings were, whilst he read the following account:—"All the children had the small-pox, and the distemper was of the most malignant kind;—the recovery of either of them was doubtful, his son's more so than the others—the doctors gave but little hope;—the next day would prove decisive, but the symptoms were so very unfavourable, that death was more probable than life.—She had forbore writing to him sooner to prevent his feeling the horrors of suspense; she had hoped from day to day that the disorder would take a favourable turn, but instead of its doing so, appearances became more and more alarming, and very little hope remained." None but a parent can feel what Harton did at that moment, and his anxiety and despair knew no bounds. His first thought was, "let me hasten to see the darlings of my

heart once more, before they are snatched from me for ever." But it was soon chased by the impossibility there seemed of his doing so. "Alas!" said he, "this letter was written a week ago—they are dead and buried by this time,—but I will go," and he shuddered as he spoke, "I neglected them when living, but I must see the remains of all that was dear to me in this world, even if I have their tomb opened to do so." He ordered his groom to hasten as much as possible to the next town, and have fresh post-horses ready by the time he arrived; and he pursued his journey with such speed, day and night, that he arrived at Berlin towards the evening of the fourth day after he received the letter.

But his perturbation became more violent the nearer he approached the town, and increased every moment till the carriage stopped at Madame de Vernon's door. He jumped out of it, and ran, or rather flew up the steps to ascertain the truth of his apprehensions as soon as possible. The servant that opened the door, stared at the wildness of his looks, and fancied him a person deprived of reason.

reason. "Are any of my children living?" said he, and he rushed past him without waiting for an answer, and opening the first door he came to, went into the room. There was no person in it, but hearing some voices proceed from an inner apartment, he hurried into it, and found several females at work, and a little girl with a face as red as scarlet sitting at a table that was covered with toys. "That is Caroline!" said he, clasping his hands, "thank God I have not lost all my children!" He caught the child in his arms, pressed her to his bosom, and almost smothered her with kisses, without paying any attention to the terror of the maids, or the cries of the affrighted child. "Don't you know me, Caroline?" said he, again kissing her, "have you entirely forgotten your father?" But recollecting at last that she was not his only child, he set her down, and looked timidly about the room.

At that moment a door opened on the other side of it, and Madame de Vernon entered; she had heard the noise in her dressing-room, and came to see what was the

matter. She immediately recollected the Count, and the sight of him, although unexpected at that moment, did not surprise her; "Is it you, Count Harton?" said she, "I am very glad to see you.—Do you know your fate?—for you cannot have received my last letter."

"I know nothing but what I see—that I at least have not lost all my children."

"You have lost none of them—they are all alive."

"All! all! and my son——"

"Is living. And although he is still ill, he has been pronounced out of danger these four days."

"Where is he?—where is he?—pray lead me to him?"

"You must have a little patience, Count, and recover yourself before you see him; for at present your excess of joy would not only frighten the child, but might injure your own health. Besides he is asleep, and it would be cruel to wake him. Nor can I take you into the room, where his bed stands, without some preparation, and informing you of something

something that I am certain will be both interesting and painful to you—But Eliza is in my dressing-room; come with me—you may see her immediately.”

He followed her, and the former scene was renewed with very little variation. As soon as the first transports of joy were a little abated, he asked Madame de Vernon a thousand questions about the children, with a velocity that frequently made it impossible for her to answer them. Nor did he find her replies satisfactory, for he wished to know every particular circumstance, and to have them related with the same quickness as he asked them: for pain, pleasure, curiosity, gratitude, fear, and pity alternately filled his mind, and it was impossible to say which of those feelings predominated in it. He at times doubted the reality of his happiness, and he repeated the questions, “Is my son alive?—is he really asleep?—is he out of danger?” at least ten times; kissed Madame de Vernon’s hand when she replied in the affirmative, and looked at her the moment after as if he doubted the truth of her assertion. It

was some time before his perturbed spirits were sufficiently calmed to allow him to listen with attention to her account of the children's danger, her uneasiness, and the trouble and confusion that had reigned in the family for the last fortnight. She informed him that the physicians (for three attended them) had at times thought all the children in danger, but of the boy's recovery they did not entertain the least hope ; that she herself had several times thought him dying, and that his being still alive might be regarded as little less than a miracle, which, next to God, was certainly owing to Madame Laborde's care. For she had nursed and attended him, and indeed all the children, with a tenderness that surpassed belief; for had they been her own she could not have done more for them, than she had for his. She had set up eight nights successively, without complaining of fatigue, had carried them about in her arms for hours together ; had lulled them to sleep in her lap ; used numberless arts to prevail on them to take their medicine, which they refused from every other hand ; had performed
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ed the most disgusting offices for them with pleasure, and unwearied attention, and that Doctor R** had often looked at her with wonder, and said, "If all my patients had as good nurses as you are, Madame Laborde, I believe nine out of ten would recover."

"But where is that amiable woman?" said the Count, wiping away the tears that had started into his eyes during Madame de Vernon's relation, "Do call her that I may assure her of my gratitude for her unmerited goodness to me and my children, or," starting from his chair, "pray lead me to her."

"It must be the latter," replied Madame de Vernon, "but before I do so, I must inform you of some more particulars which will increase your wonder and admiration, but at the same time wound your susceptible heart: your children are all saved; but death seems determined to have a victim, and that victim is no other than the good, the amiable Laborde!—For God's sake, spare your astonishment, Count, till I have finished my relation. During the time that she attended your children with such unremitting care, the
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thought of her not having had that cruel disorder herself never occurred to me, or any one else ; for neither her words nor manner betrayed the least fear or care of herself. The children, as I said before, were never so easy as when they were in her arms, and Frederick in particular often rested his face covered with the infection upon her cheek or bosom for hours together, which she not only endured, but even seemed to receive pleasure when he did so. Four days ago, about an hour after your son was pronounced out of danger, she was seized with a fainting fit as she was standing by his bed-side, and fell lifeless upon the floor. She soon recovered, but judge of my astonishment, when I heard her say, ‘ I believe I am seized with the small-pox, for I have not had it.’ She has been confined to her bed ever since ;—at first Doctor R** thought the symptoms favourable, but he shook his head yesterday, and about two hours ago he assured me she was in very great danger ; for the eruption which began to appear, has suddenly struck in. If nature has strength enough to throw it out again, she

may be saved, but weakened as she is, he is very doubtful of that being the case. She is asleep at present, and as I believe this sleep will prove a crisis, I wait for her waking with the most anxious impatience : and I am certain you will excuse me for not leading you to your son sooner, when I tell you that his bed is in her room ; for she particularly desired not to be separated from him, nor is she ever so easy as when he is near her."

CHAP. XI.

MADAME de Vernon stopped, for her tears prevented her proceeding, and Harton's joy was greatly damped; for gratitude and sorrow were the only sensations his mind was capable of feeling at that time. Nor were they lessened by the person, whose life was in danger, being personally unknown to him, nor by the lowness of her extraction, which often inclines persons of exalted rank to think, in cases of a similar kind, that it is but a servant, and one more or less in the world is of no great consequence;—but the obligations he was under to Madame Laborde were too recent, the commendations bestowed on her by Madame de Vernon too great, and the transition

transition from joy to sorrow too sudden, not to operate violently on Harton's naturally humane heart. He looked mournfully at his daughters; the eldest wept, and said she would be sick again with all her heart, if she could cure her dear Madame Laborde. Harton folded her in his arms, and kissed her, and desired Madame de Vernon to assure Doctor R**, that if he saved her life, his gratitude should be boundless. A servant at that moment entered the room, and informed her mistress that Madame Laborde had just awakened in a violent tremor. Madame de Vernon hurried to her; and the Count, without enquiring if he might, or if his doing so was proper, followed her, holding a hand of each of his daughters in his.

The patient raised herself up a little in her bed when she saw Madame de Vernon, who was just going to inform her of the Count's arrival when he entered the room. She immediately saw him,—started—trembled—and faintly articulated, “Am I awake, or do I dream? for God's sake tell me who is that I see!” “And for God's sake,” exclaimed
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the Count at the same moment, "whose voice is that I hear? Statira! Statira! is it you?" She was silent, gasped for breath, and her head sunk upon the pillow. "Help! help! she is dying!" screamed the servants who attended, and were raising her up, whilst Madame de Vernon was speaking to her. Harton had let go his children's hands as soon as he heard her voice, and pushing away the person that stood nearest him, he leant over the bed, and clasped his Statira in his arms, without attending to the noise the surrounding persons made. "Statira! Statira!" said he, "I conjure you by all that is sacred, say, if the voice I just heard was your's?—say, are you my Statira?—is this the place where we meet again?—is it you who saved my children's lives?—Answer! Oh! answer me; remove my doubts, and administer some comfort to my despairing mind!" Her sinking spirits revived at that moment, and raising herself up again, and fixing her eyes on the Count, said, "I am Statira! those children's mother, and was your wife. Forgive me, Count, for intruding myself where the laws forbid,

forbid, but where Nature called me, and its voice was too powerful for me to resist! and I hope my innocent deceit has not been entirely useless, for I did all in my power to form your daughters' minds as much as their tender ages would admit, and to save your son's life; let him be my advocate if you are offended at it."

"Offended!—I offended!—Oh! where shall I find words to express the admiration I feel!—the admiration you deserve!"

"I neither deserve, nor require admiration, for I did nothing but my duty. I now with pleasure resign my children into your hands, and rejoice that my race is run—my sorrows ended. According to all appearances I have but a few moments to live, and let me make use of them to assure you, in the most solemn manner, that I never was guilty of the crime I was accused of. You will find a written declaration of my innocence addressed to you among my papers; surely the words of a dying person may be trusted; they seldom utter a premeditated falsehood!"

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The deliberation and energy with which she pronounced these words, did not seem to proceed from the lips of a dying person. But it was like the last blaze of an expiring flame; for as soon as she had uttered them, her strength and speech forsook her, and she fell senseless upon the pillow; large drops of cold sweat ran down her forehead, and the agonies of death, so shocking to the beholders, although but little felt by the dying person, convulsed her whole frame,

To describe the surprise the foregoing scene occasioned Madame de Vernon, or Harton's feelings on the conviction of her innocence, and the consciousness of his unjustifiable conduct, the cries of the children and attendants, and the means that were tried a long time in vain, to recover the patient, is impossible; for the room exhibited a scene of confusion that exceeds description; messenger was sent after messenger, to fetch the Doctor; he came at last, and was informed, in as concise a manner as possible, of what had just happened. Harton assured him that half his fortune should be his if he could
save

save her life. Doctor R** felt her pulse, and said, "Nature may have resources that I am unacquainted with, but it is not in the power of medicine to help her, and why should I flatter you with vain hopes? I have not the least idea of her recovery. It is possible that she may revive again for a few minutes, but I own I should think her living till to-morrow morning a miracle."

But it was one that did not happen. The Countess remained in a state of insensibility near three hours, and every moment was expected would be her last. But the convulsive motion abated, and she lay quiet for some time as if in a doze, from which she awaked seemingly refreshed. She opened her eyes, and first fixed them on her daughter, who was kneeling at her bed-side, and then on her husband, who, in the agony of despair, had thrown himself upon the ground, and hid his face in the bed-clothes. He started up when he heard her move, and clasping his hands, said, "Live! Oh! live, Statira! the whole study of my life shall be to make you all the amends in my power for my criminal

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minal conduct towards you !” The Countess smiled, and holding out her hand to him, said in broken accents, “ Live !—no—I wish to die !—my wish—is granted—I die happy !—my children,—where—are they ?” They were lifted upon the bed ; she kissed them, and then continued, “ God bless you !—once more—to—call you—mine—in—in your—father’s presence,—was— my only wish—and—frequent—prayer.—It is granted !—Father—of mercy—I thank—thee for it !”—“ And do you forgive me, Statira ?” said the Count ; “ can you pardon your repentant and wretched husband ?”—“ I forgave—you—long ago,—I—now—repeat the—assurance—of it,—pitied—and loved—you.” The Count kissed the last words from her quivering lips, and a flood of tears, the first he had shed, gushed from his eyes, and fell upon her cheek. At that moment, her spirit fled, she gave a deep sigh—and was no more.

Every attempt to recover her was repeated, but they all proved vain ; and Harton, who continued to hold her in his arms, and declared she was not dead, was with difficulty prevailed

vailed on to leave the room, or, to speak more properly, forced from it. "Oh! my God!" would he frequently exclaim, "why did I not come some weeks ago?—why just to day? Perhaps the sight of me hastened or occasioned her death. I was the happiest of men—had the best of wives, whom I not only tormented and rejected, but have even murdered." The greatest part of the night was spent in moans and lamentations of the like nature, and Madame de Vernon, who was herself extremely afflicted, could not comfort,—she could only weep with him.

The Count's loss was certain, but the circumstances attending it were still a mystery to him; for Madame de Vernon could give him no other account than that her letters contained;—but as the Countess had informed him that he would find a written explanation among her papers, it was his first business the next morning to look for it. As soon as he opened her writing-desk, he found a large packet directed to him. He hastily opened it; it contained her will, and a long letter, which, as appeared by the date,

was begun the day that the children's illness was known to be the small-pox, and concluded the last night she sat up with her son; which was a fresh proof that she foresaw her approaching illness and death. The letter contained a justification of her conduct, and the same proofs of her innocence that had, alas! been so often disregarded, as well as a short account of the methods she had taken to secure the success of the plan she had devised and happily executed, which she solemnly declared was neither suggested by a sudden thought, nor the wish to be admired, nor to excite wonder should it ever be discovered; but by real maternal affection, and the desire of being near her children. The first idea of it occurred to her the day she was separated from her daughter, and their being sent to Berlin, a town she had never been in, and to a family where she was unknown, strengthened her resolution, and determined her to put it into execution; and from that time it was the only object that employed her thoughts. To prevent the children's recollecting her, she had endured the severe mortification of not
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seeing them for two years, as she supposed that time, and the change that sorrow had occasioned, her having dyed her light brown hair black, and the entire alteration of her dress, would effectually prevent their remembering her. But although the Baroness de L** had procured her a recommendation to Madame de Vernon, she had met many difficulties before she was engaged as governess. She had been rejected twice, and if the third trial had not succeeded, she had formed the resolution of trusting that lady with her secret. She was, however, fortunate enough to be engaged without doing so, and she declared that she felt happier at that moment than she had ever done in her life. The children did not know her, and during the year she had lived with them, she had only seen two of her former acquaintance, and they did not seem to have the slightest knowledge of her. But as there was nothing she so much dreaded as being discovered, she had lived as retired as possible, had made no acquaintance, and when Madame de Vernon had company, she had always desired she would excuse her appearing
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with the children, which she, without enquiring her motives, had kindly consented to. But she owned these precautions, as well as the care she took in every other respect, would not have been sufficient to conceal her so entirely, if Providence had not assisted her endeavours, which was a blessing she should always acknowledge with gratitude to the latest hour of her life. But she confessed the enemy she had the greatest reason to fear, was her own heart; for that had often been on the point of playing the traitor. She concluded with the assurance, that it was her intention to continue to act her present part till the Count sent for his children, and then to discover herself to Madame de Vernon; and as she was convinced of the sincerity of her friendship, to try, if, through her meditation, she could be happy enough to effect a reconciliation with her husband, which she had always ardently wished for. The Baroness de L** was the only person that was informed of the secret; she had at first dissuaded her from engaging in a scheme that she thought it impossible for her to persevere in, but finding her

her resolution fixed, she had done all in her power to assist her, and had indeed been of great service to her. The promise of a large sum of money at the termination of the affair had sealed her lips, and she desired if the Count received this letter, which would only be in case of her death, that the sum mentioned might be regarded as a legacy.

Every thing that was before dark and mysterious was cleared up; and the astonished Count did not know which of his wife's actions deserved the most admiration; for her resolution, the prudence of the measures she had adopted, and her perseverance in the painful and difficult task, appeared alike wonderful to him, and he equally lamented his former delusion and his present loss.

The information, that the Countess's remains were interred in the most pompous manner, a magnificent monument erected to her memory, that double the sum she had bequeathed to her friend was given her, and every other article of her will punctually fulfilled, may appear trifling to my readers; but that she continued to live in her husband's

memory, that he always pronounced her name with a sacred kind of veneration to the latest hour of his life, that the tears often started into his eyes when he saw his children, and that he would frequently exclaim, when he looked at his son, "Why! Oh why! was your life purchased with your mother's?" are convincing proofs of the sincerity of his sorrow, and the poignancy of his regrets, for the loss of her, whose worth he did not know how to estimate whilst living.

F I N I S.



